

IN QUEST OF SPLENDOUR

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ROGER LEMELIN



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FOR MY CHILDREN, so that later on

*Here beneath the sun chance and the moment
rule all. Nor does man see his end coming. . . .*

—Ecclesiastes, 9 : 11-12

[*Ed. note :* The above is the translator's version. In the King James version, the lines corresponding to the author's quotation are as follows :

*. . . . but time and chance happeneth to them all.
For man also knoweth not his time.]*

PREFACE

THIS novel was written for and about French Canadians. Their educational system figures largely in it, and is different enough from the American or English to require explanation. It differs both in content and in structure. Its content represents an heroic effort to retain as much as possible of the universal humanities, conceived as requisite for all educated men, and at the same time to keep decently abreast of the modern push toward specialization. This struggle, of course, has marked education everywhere in the modern world ; no more in French Canada than elsewhere has it reached any final resolution. For obvious historical reasons, however, the resistance of the humanities has been tougher here than in many other lands.

The structural differences are the ones that count most for understanding this book. It must be remembered that until recently there was no compulsory education in the Province of Quebec. For the very reason that they were not compulsory when they were first established, the primary and universal grades are of shorter duration than is usual elsewhere—six years. These are the only free years ; after that, though they are not high, there are fees.

The secondary years are about double the length usual in English-speaking countries—at least eight years and, in the case of the sciences, as much as ten. The newcomers in the secondary field are the schools for “ practical ” subjects—the trades, agriculture, commerce, domestic economy—in certain cases leading to the possibility of more advanced work in each speciality at the university level. But the real core of the secondary system is the “ classical course,” given in the “ Petits Séminaires ” operated by diocesan priests and in the generally younger “ Collèges,” operated by the

religious orders. The same course for girls is available in convent schools. Until a half decade ago this classical course was absolutely uniform throughout the Province; a slight differentiation, based upon aptitude, is now the rule for the last four years, but it is a differentiation of emphasis more than of matter. Every aspirant to professions in any sense "learned"—the priesthood, the law, medicine, engineering of any sort—or to a university degree in the arts or sciences, must successfully conclude the "cours classique." He is then ready for university work in theology, the law, or the humanities; for the sciences he must either have done enough on his own to pass the special entrance examinations, or he must take a year or two more of "pre-scientific" work before he can enter the university.

English readers must be specially warned against the clerical connotations of the word "seminary" and the non-clerical connotations of the word "college." Schools going by either name prepare equally for entrance to the university, and both enrol students aiming at any profession or degree for which the "classical course" is a prerequisite.

Of course in translating the book it would have been easier to cheat—and leave out this explanation. For "Petit Séminaire" (Minor Seminary) I could have given "high school," "academy," or "college." But to have done so would have led readers to miss the point. Psychologically everything depends on the fact that, in finishing his studies at the Minor Seminary, Pierre has become an adult. He is, being precocious, nineteen; he could easily have been twenty or twenty-one. He is through being a "sophomore." He has had fourteen years of schooling and he is ready either for the world or for professional training. In the United States he would be half-way through "college," or all through "junior college"; in England or English-speaking Canada he would be well on his way to a bachelor's degree. In French Quebec he has his "baccalauréat" and

has had about two years more than the secondary education in most other countries.

The university, then, is wholly devoted to specialties, with its various "faculties," "schools," and "institutes," all parts of the greater university corporation and community, yet each a law unto itself. The "Grand Séminaire" in Quebec, which is a specialized institution educating exclusively for the priesthood, happens historically to be the senior university faculty in that city. It is really the faculty of theology of Laval University, but being a great deal older than the University itself, it retains its original name and has, perhaps, a slight tendency to dwell upon its autonomy and seemingly to minimize the fact that it is a constituent part of a larger whole. Being the oldest, it is likewise the wealthiest faculty, and in recent years has played a most generous part in meeting the deficits of the University as a whole.

Another point that should be made depends on the peculiar nature of French-Canadian culture: it is intensely close-knit and homogeneous, if far from united. Its society is small and cannot support a great diversity of institutions—schools or universities. In a sense it is one big family, since all are descended from a handful of ancestors. The result is a general democracy whose snobbery is based wholly on money or position. In a word, there is no *noblesse*, there are no peasants. There are the rich, the well-placed, the comfortable, and the poor. And the vast majority are, by general standards, if not by French-Canadian, cousins. Hence Pierre and Yvon could scarcely escape each other, and Madame Letellier's snobbery is peculiarly shocking, since she might, without knowing it, easily be blood kin to those she thinks so far beneath her.

One final word about the language in which *Pierre le Magnifique* is written. Those who know only "French"

French might wonder at certain things if ever they were to take the trouble to compare my translation with the original. Canadian French is a youthful and lively language, just like American English, and it has its meanings and nuances unknown to the mother tongue.

HARRY LORIN BINSSE

POINTE AU PIC,

PART I

1

“HEY, there, chipmunk ! What about it ? Have you made up your mind ? Will you be a priest, or won’t you ? ”

Pierre gritted his teeth. Did this fellow have nothing else to do except smoke and loll against the wall of his house near the University ? He must be all of thirty, never wore a necktie, and chanted the word chipmunk—varying the tone as it pleased him—every time a student clad in the dark uniform with its white braids down the back chanced to pass through the staid old street leading to the preparatory seminary. Pierre lowered his eyes, furtively aware of his navy-blue garments, now greenish with age and worn thin at cuff and elbow. Pierre held nothing against the man ; however often he called him chipmunk, it was never with the sneering scorn so bitter to his classmates. Yet the mere use of the word was a noying.

The man—whose name, even, Pierre did not know—kept wryly watching him. Had his lips not been clamped tight on a cigarette that drooped almost to his chin, you might have thought he was smiling in sympathy at the abashed young seminarist. Brusquely, Pierre straightened his cap. Instead of continuing on his way, as his shy impatience urged him to, he crossed the street and confronted the cigarette-smoker. Pierre could have given you no reason for this odd trait which made him rush headlong against everything that bothered or puzzled him, against everything his common sense urged him to flee. The reaction was a smile so broad that the languishing cigarette tumbled to the sidewalk.

“ I don’t like you to call me chipmunk, sir ! ” He spat the words out with an assertiveness that did not ring true.

Still smiling, the man studied Pierre deliberately. "Don't be silly! I find you an attractive chipmunk."

Pierre was conscious of a wave of colour burning his cheeks. So he was attractive? What about his sullen urge to rebel against everything? He turned, as though to continue on his way.

"Wait a minute!" the man exclaimed. "I won't bite you. So you're going to be a priest?"

"Yes. The sooner the better, and I'm proud of it. I don't care what you think."

His assertiveness was returning, more freely now, making him feel strong again. Let this loafer dare say a disrespectful word about the priesthood! But once more Pierre had tilted at a windmill: the man became quite serious, and heaved a sigh.

"Well, that's fine. I think you'll make an attractive and understanding priest. To-day is prize-giving, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And it's my guess you lead the class."

"Yes."

The man's eyes brightened, and it was good to see his face, hardened by sarcasm, regain a smoothness and purity not unlike that of the nineteen-year-old scholar who stood before him. So far away, so near at hand was the time when, for him as well, June brought the school year to a triumphant close and ushered in two months of sunshine. Now, at thirty, the years ended with the last day of December—or rather, they had no beginning and no end. He rubbed his forehead, then shoved his fingers back through his brown hair.

"Your parents aren't with you?"

It would have been so easy for Pierre merely to have said no, without explanation, or to have invented some lie. But that iron talon, which had taken root somewhere in his chest along with his lungs and his heart, that talon

with which he had torn to shreds every opportunity for easy happiness, tensed once more.

"My father is dead. I have one brother ; he's a fireman, and what happens at school doesn't interest him. Mother, so that she can pay the rent, works for three dollars a day as a cleaning woman. She couldn't get the day off. She's waxing the floors of a house on the Grande Allée, a fine house which belongs to the mother of one of my classmates. Anything else you'd like to know ? "

The man bit his lip and then jerked open the front door of the house.

"Fernande ! Fernande ! Can you come here a moment? It's important ! "

She came, her features drawn tight and betraying a certain shyness. In her haste her slippers thudded against her heels. When she saw Pierre, embarrassment made her stop short in the doorway. "Come on," urged the man. She lingered, giving an additional fold to the faded green dressing-gown ; portions of this garment were dripping wet from the hasty wash .g she had just given her lustrous black hair, which now lay scattered in confusion over her shoulders. She fumbled to make sure the gown was well-buttoned over her breasts, and protested : "What on earth do you want ? "

As though to achieve a little poise, she began smoothing out long strands of her hair with a tiny comb. At each long, slow stroke of the comb her head bent slightly, accentuating the strange softness of the sidelong, timid glances she gave Pierre.

It was the first time that Pierre had ever looked in such fashion at a woman. And yet it produced in him not the least feeling of surprise, for he felt that he had always known Fernande. He recognized her ; her features were exactly those of the girl who for years had slept in the depths of his senses. She stood before him, alive, sweet-

smelling, with her red, moist mouth, her large grey eyes that took on a tint of green whenever her nostrils distended, quivering at the slightest emotion. And how white her skin was !

"If you're game, Fernande, we'll not go bathing. I've a better idea. We'll attend our friend's closing exercises. Take a good look at him. He's the most charming chipmunk I've ever seen."

The young woman seemed in no way astonished at her companion's sudden and puzzling decision. She seemed even to accede to it with the submissiveness of a happy slave. "We'll be seeing you soon, then," she said, smiled shyly and disappeared into the house. That soft voice, with its slight huskiness—that, too, he recognized.

A sharp tap on the shoulder aroused Pierre from his reverie. "If you want to make a good priest, don't look at women that way! Well, then, it's agreed. We'll be in the assembly hall."

It was not until this moment that the stranger's kindness began to move Pierre. He put out his hand and, with seeming coldness, thanked this gentleman who, all the same, had called him a chipmunk. But within his breast he did not feel the iron talon ; only a very gentle happiness.

A tumult of sound rumbled through the assembly hall, rising from the floor on which hundreds of impatient young feet were scuffling, from a floor tortured by chairs that scraped and screeched under the squirming students, each flanked by exasperated or triumphant parents ; and to this confusion was added another, as adolescent odours, school odours, were challenged by the ladies' perfumes. Then the clashing brasses of a band perched in the gallery cut through the uproar with their strident tones, as though at the turn of a single head the attention of the gathering was focused on the long tables heaped with gilt-edged books.

the long tables that the prefect of studies had spread with a baize as purple as the cape of the Rector, who now sat solemnly enthroned in the seat of honour, facing the assembly.

The Seminary band began the exercises by playing "Colonel Bogey's March" with an expenditure of effort bordering on martyrdom. The big bass rumbled, lost its breath, then exploded in a huge *poof*; the trombone purred and growled, then snorted; and the trumpets, imprisoned in a long wail, released themselves suddenly with a piercing scream.

There then followed the awarding of prizes to the children's classes. You could distinguish the top boy in each class by his accumulation of books, behind which his body and head were sometimes almost completely hidden. The Rector majestically presented the prizes to the hero's mother, and she, in a flutter of emotion, transferred the stack of trophies to her son, who blushed beet-red with bashfulness at the avalanche of books, kisses, and applause.

The priests who were full professors were lined up on either side of the Rector; other young and less important ecclesiastics zealous trotted back and forth in the fever of year's end and sweated as much as the valiant father-director of the band, who was still dabbing his sodden handkerchief against his forehead.

"Hey! What's up! Voltaire's here!"

The exclamation had echoed from the lips of the "senior" boys at sight of a tall cleric, all skin and bones, all nose, arms, and fingers, wearing a monocle and advancing slowly along the side aisle, his posture soldierly and scornful. It was Father Lippé, professor of literature and fifty-two years of age. Once a student at the Sorbonne, a misogynist without knowing why, he was temperamentally crushed under an accumulation of little habits grumblingly acquired and thereafter faithfully retained. One of his characteristic

quirks was to annoy his colleagues by treating them with a condescension bordering on contempt, and even by scandalizing them (he had recently suggested as set subject for a French composition, "Cretins and Catholicism") ; his assumption of a European attitude angered the Canadian intransigence of the Rector, who looked upon the "old countries," France especially, as greatly deteriorated, the sole exception being the Vatican. Hence the nickname "Voltaire," which had been bestowed upon Father Lippé by his pupils. Moreover, Father Lippé was proud of this sobriquet in a school where the reading of Voltaire was viewed askance. Probably become a priest through the need of cutting himself off from the run of mankind, Jerome Lippé, as he grew older, had wanted to distinguish himself from the generality of clerics, not by promotion to a bishopric or other dignity, but by creating for himself a reputation as a priest apart from the others, an original, almost an anti-clerical priest. At a time when many priests of the diocese opposed conscription, had he not enlisted in the Canadian Army? There were those who said in private that he was an opportunist, for it was held that, things being as they were, a priest who was in the good graces of Ottawa could hope much of the future. Little did they know Jerome Lippé. He looked no farther than his room, his books, his habits, and his need to astonish.

"Voltaire's going to sit down in front !".

Instead of taking a place in the first row among the surprised ecclesiastics who beckoned him with friendly gestures to join them, Jerome Lippé drew up a chair for himself and placed it against the wall. His fellow-priests, however, reserved for him some small sympathy because of one of his hobbies ; Father Lippé owned a camera and conscientiously, through protracted sittings, he photographed many of his colleagues. When the operation had been completed, he would enchantedly remark : "Now I

shall have a precious close-up of that extraordinary something I find in your face."

Before sitting down, he looked the assemblage over with the cold eye of a German baron, his thin lips finally stretching into a friendly smile. He had just espied Pierre, his favourite pupil.

Pierre, squeezed in between two ladies each of whom was flanked by her own son, waved to him. Pierre's happiness was complete. He smiled, for even Father Lippé's head, when he let his glance stay fixed upon it, was adorned with long, black hair that became identical with Fernande's. It was beyond him to dismiss that vision or the sound of her voice when she had said, "We'll be seeing you soon." Had they arrived, Fernande and the tall chap? Pierre turned thoughtful. Idle promises. Our friends don't keep their promises—much less strangers. The couple would not come. Pierre felt his whole being tighten into a knot in protest against that trusting heart of his, the betrayer of his stern fortitude. How silly he was to let himself be overwhelmed by this new feeling, by this friendship he had not willed but which possessed him absolutely. Ever since that meeting he had almost forgotten his future priesthood, even Christ, the immeasurable Friendship that never leaves us forsaken. In his worst moments of humiliation, of loneliness, he had sought refuge in this thought of Christ, and clinging to it tightly, he had always recovered a calm power. For the past hour it had become impossible for him even to evoke Goya's head of Christ Crucified, a reproduction of which hung upon his bedroom wall. This very head—oh, sacrilege!—melted into Fernande's features.

At his side Madame Letellier—socially so secure—kept furtively glancing at him, and when Father Lippé waved at Pierre she tightened her lips. Finally she spoke to him.

You make yourself friends in high places, don't you,

Pierre Boisjoly ? That's clever of you. Keep it up. You'll go far—in the clergy, of course. When I get back I'll tell your mother she need not worry about your future."

Pierre stared at her fixedly, but saw her only through a haze. Without second thought he spoke the words that for years had been ripening within him on this woman's account : " You will also tell her that it is the last time she will work in your home. You will then have one less reason for being ashamed of yourself."

This reply, to which he at once perceived the reaction in Madame Letellier's eyes—blazing with hatred—released within him a smouldering anger. What major decision was he contemplating, that he should speak thus to her, however long she might have deserved to hear such words ? For years she had taken pains to try to humiliate him, and always before he had been able to remain indifferent to her tactics. Meanest of all, she had asked Madame Boisjoly to work at her house on the very day when Pierre finished the Minor Seminary at the head of his class. The charwoman had accepted with a kind of relief, and Pierre had quickly closed with a prayer the wound in his own heart.

A priest mounted the platform and announced : " Before reading the prize-list of the graduating class and before its members choose their ribbons, the Letellier quartet, directed by Yvon Letellier, one of the more brilliant to receive a diploma to-day, will render his arrangement of '*M'en revenant de la jolie Rochelle.*' "

Yvon Letellier, tall, thin, blond, his school tunic enhancing his fine build, rose first and nonchalantly looked at his wrist-watch ; his mother, to relieve herself of the confused rage which Pierre's answer had aroused in her, nervously pulled at the hem of her son's tunic, making it fit more smoothly. With a glance Yvon Letellier mobilized the members of his quartet who were already on their way to the platform amidst the applause of the audience, and then



leaned over and whispered in his mother's ear: "Be patient. He'll pay us for his fine words."

Pierre heard him and did not budge. Letellier speaking over his mother's head, asked: "Well, are you coming, Boisjoly?"

Overwhelmed by his own indignation, Pierre got up and, clammy with sudden stage-fright, joined the other four as they neared the platform. What was it that made him fear the Letelliers' vengeance? Now that he had taken up the burden of defending himself, their malice frightened him. How cruel they were to hound him, a poor, studious young man, eager-hearted, whose dearest wish was to become such a priest as would earn the approval of the good man who was paying for his education, dear Father Loupret. For the first time he could not find it in himself to forgive them.

Pierre Boisjoly possessed a superb bass voice, and it would have delighted Yvon Letellier to have been able to do without it. This top student in their class, this son of the cleaning woman who once a week waxed the floors of his mother's house, was the only shadow over the life of the youthful and brilliant Letellier, nephew of the Honourable Mr. Letellier, Attorney-General of the Province. Too proud to show his irritation at the academic victories which Pierre had snatched from him for years with an ease and lack of concern that tortured his vanity, Yvon Letellier was also too astute not to accept in his quartet the bass voice that was the proud boast of the whole Minor Seminary. Had he openly shown his rancour, Yvon would certainly not have been a worthy son of his late father, the shrewd and artful lawyer who had enriched himself at the government's expense, whatever party might be in power, and who had lived his life saying nice things about everyone, especially his enemies, while legally emptying their pockets whenever he had the chance. The fact that Yvon avenged himself

more subtly on Pierre, by calling upon all those able to contribute, say, to the funds of the entertainment committee for a public show of hands in the classroom, or by drawing attention with a lazy gesture to the false notes for which Pierre was supposedly responsible when the quartet appeared in shows organized by the students, was sure sign of Letellier's aptitude for self-advancement. If Pierre's legs were already a trifle shaky, it was in part because he anticipated more of this treachery, but mainly at the thought of the following number, "*Le Cor*," which he was to sing solo. Pierre knew that he would triumph, that the applause would echo, that he would prove to all how Letellier could avail nothing against him, but he was nervous because a woman and a friend whom he scarcely knew would witness the whole business. Standing before the assembly, his hands behind his back, Pierre scanned the faces confronting him, row on row.

This patient examination of the audience's anonymity was wasted effort, for the tall stranger, elegantly dressed in a pale grey suit and accompanied by Fernande, was moving down the side aisle, smiling, toward Father Lippé, who watched their approach with a frown of curiosity. Fernande was wearing a beige costume which soberly outlined her figure; her black hair, gathered at the back, protruded behind a tiny veiled hat and looked almost too heavy for her long, slim neck. Pierre saw the timid smile behind the screen of the veil, and his hands, still clasped behind his back, tightened until the knuckles cracked. Several heads had turned toward the couple and followed them down the aisle. Here and there could be heard surprised whispers: "It's that bun who calls us chipmunks! What nerve!"

Father Lippé suddenly seemed attracted to this smart couple. He got up, drew two other chairs out of the front row, and gallantly invited the newcomers to be seated. A number of remarks, such as "Voltaire, Des Grieux, and Manon!" began to run from mouth to mouth, but soon

ceased when Yvon Letellier gave the note and raised his arm. The melody rolled along, without too many blemishes and with fine sweeping gestures on Letellier's part, but with a certain stiffness and a jerky monotony on the part of the singers. The arrangement suggested a plain-chant influence, and the execution lacked spontaneity. Then the rich, sonorous tones of Pierre's voice suddenly overwhelmed the other three, and, dripping with perspiration, he forced himself to hold it in at Letellier's exaggerated and repeated injunctions.

When the piece was over, and during the height of the applause, Yvon Letellier assumed an air of annoyance which he took great pains that everyone should see. Leaning close to Pierre, he said, "Why can't you stop dragging your notes after the others are through? Just showing off your voice, eh?"

The enemy of the chipmunks, who had noticed Letellier's manoeuvre, turned to his companion who was seated between him and Father Lippé. "I bet his mother's working that young snob's home."

"Can such mean people really exist?" she murmured.

"You'll meet plenty more. But right now I'd gladly crack that Letellier's jaw."

Father Lippé, who had overheard, turned toward him and remarked gently: "You would not be breaking much, sir. Letellier has the jawbone of a good-for-nothing. I'll have to take his picture."

Astonished, the man gaily extended his hand to Father "Voltaire," who shook it with altogether clerical solemnity, to the amazement of the watching students. Pierre, still scarlet at Letellier's remark, cast a furtive, almost suppliant glance toward Fernande, who encouraged him with a smile and a discreet nod of her head. The priest, after the hand-clasp, added: "Anyway, the next number will be Pierre's interpretation of '*Le Cor*.' What a voice! You'll see. It's

worthy of the Metropolitan. Indeed it was solely to hear him that I came here this afternoon."

As the applause died down, Yvon Letellier began to make an announcement. He was wholly self-possessed, and said with an easy gesture: "Thank you, thank you. I regret that I have something disappointing to tell you. Pierre Boisjoly will be unable to sing '*Le Cor*' for you. He tells me that he is not in good voice. The next item will be the distribution of prizes to the graduating class."

A murmur of regret ran through the hall, and Pierre, who seemed not to understand what had happened, stepped down from the platform after his comrades. At the foot of the steps, Letellier turned to him and whispered out of the corner of his mouth: "That will teach you not to talk to my mother like a jackass." For an instant Pierre wondered how he could restrain himself and not murder Letellier, strangle him with his powerful hands. In the innermost recesses of his body the claws were tensing, grasping hold of his whole being, leaving him breathless. It was at such times that he used to hurl himself upon the thought of Christ and emerge from it strengthened. He longed to find again that Christ from whom he had strayed so far during the last hour. He could not, for his wandering eyes fixed upon the exasperated face of his new friend, and then shifted to Fernande's saddened, pouting features. And of a sudden the audience saw Pierre Boisjoly hasten back upon the platform to say, almost under his breath: "I will sing you '*Le Cor*'! I feel perfectly all right!"

Yvon Letellier, just about to sit down, stiffened into rigidity. The audience was already glancing suspiciously at him. In a flash he understood, and his hands were the first to clap frantically, his features assuming a look of happy surprise. Motionless, arms tense on either side of his body, Pierre saw nothing, heard nothing. Enthusiastic feet drummed upon the floor; boys flung up their hands,

applauding above their heads ; the Rector crossed his fingers over his stomach, and the younger priests smiled with the pure rapture of children.

What Pierre saw was the large crucifix at the end of the hall ; he saw it with extraordinary clarity, as though no dense air were interposed between his eyes and the distant cross. He could only have murmured " Lord," but within him it was an explosion. What did it matter to him that Letellier, as he subsided in defeat, exchanged a look of wrath with his mother ? Was he for the moment aware even of Fernande, whose entire being projected itself toward him in a whole-hearted surge of interest and sympathy, or yet of the man whose hand now tightened upon her arm ? (" I told you, Fernande," he was whispering excitedly, " he's an amazing chipmunk. Just like me. . . . I feel he's so like me. . . . Tell me, don't you think so too ? ")

Nor was Pierre aware of Father Lippe, who in his vast contentment was grasping his knees with his bony hands and muttering, " I've simply got to take his picture for my number one wall. And this very evening ! "

Silence had come, ready to drink in Pierre's voice. And this was the very moment when a frightful doubt suddenly invaded him, swiftly replacing the exaltation that had just coursed through his veins. The doubt took on a precise phrasing, which twisted itself around his frightened heart : " Perhaps you are not meant to be a priest. You must not mislead yourself. Better for you to struggle with this evil world upon its own ground—as a layman. You are strong ; accept the challenge ! " His voice swelled forth, solemn, rounded, wed to his overpowering perplexity. This dreadful thought of forsaking his vocation was coming to him now for the first time. From where ? He sang with all his soul to escape the fear that beset him.

When he returned to his seat near Madame Letellier, the applause that broke out was even louder than before ; all

heads turned toward him, nodding to him, claiming his friendship. 'Everyone was proud of Pierre Boisjoly.

But Pierre did not smile ; he stared fixedly before him. His terrible obsession occupied him wholly, darkening his universe. The applause redoubled, and Madame Letellier could not restrain herself. "You also have a future as a night-club singer," she said.

"I beg you, Mother, leave him alone," whispered her son, as he put his hand on her arm.

"Night-club singer ?" said Pierre inattentively. "Who knows ?"

Taken aback, mother and son exchanged glances. Pierre's whole body slackened. "Who knows ?" he had answered. Was it really he who had said those words, and without pretext from his heart ? He looked for Fernande. She was listening to Father Lippé, who was explaining something to her very seriously. Her eyes stole in Pierre's direction, and at once he lowered his glance. Someone was announcing : "We shall now proceed to the distribution of prizes to the graduating class, and to the selection of ribbons."

Yvon Letellier bent his head in vexation. Nervously his mother tugged at the handbag on her lap. More glory for Pierre—that insolent son of a common charwoman, who had perhaps merely pretended to have a priestly vocation in order to get his pastor to pay for his schooling. Now he had almost shown his hand.

The young men who had been summoned were leaving their places beside their mothers and lining up on the platform. Pierre examined the audience with curiosity, as though a new world had opened before him. Was it really possible that the headlong fervour which for ten years had swept him toward the priesthood should so abruptly have melted away ? Already he was more aware of the shabbiness of his clothes, of his down-at-heel shoes, of the fine set of his shoulders, of the strength lying packed in his clenched

fists. Was he living through a bad dream, or was he being born to a new life? The crucifix at the far end of the hall seemed so far away now, and all this audience, all his fellow-students, seemed to him strangers. Only Fernande and her companion were close to him. The blood drained from his face.

An aged, white-haired priest, hat in hand, was moving up the centre aisle, guided by the reverend professor of philosophy. Father Loupret! Father Loupret who was paying for his studies, who treated him with the affectionate care of a loving parent, had come to witness his Pierre's triumph, the triumph of this child who was to become a leader among priests. The old cleric was shown to a seat directly behind the Rector; eager hands tried to relieve him of his hat, but he clung to it obstinately, smiling toothlessly at Pierre the while.

The announcer of honours and prizes took his place at the front of the platform: "First prize for general excellence, first prize in philosophy, first prize for his dissertation, first prize in apologetics. . . ."

The professor of philosophy moved toward the long table, picked up an enormous pile of books tied together with a red ribbon, returned to the elderly pastor, who was raising himself from his chair, and handed him the prizes. Applause thundered through the assembly hall. Icy cold, Pierre descended the central steps and moved toward the old priest, who came forward and handed him the volumes. Cheers and bravos were now mixed with the applause; tear-drops hung from the lashes of the aged cleric, and his hands trembled. He murmured, "Thank you, my son, thank you for the most beautiful day in my life."

Pierre said nothing; he could not draw his terrified eyes from the rapture which transfigured the priest's face. Like an automaton he returned to his seat beside Madame Letellier. The plaudits became even louder.

Amidst all this noise, Madame Letellier hissed at Pierre, who was dizzy with confusion, "Aren't you ashamed, you hypocrite, at making a fool of this old priest? Aren't you ashamed of having robbed him? Go ahead! Tell them that you are not going to be a priest, and see how long the applause will last."

He looked at her wildly, but could make no answer. His fists tightened. The talon was no longer deep within him; now he felt it in his throat, in his muscles, in every vein of his body. What power of hatred, what longing to kill, to destroy, surged through him? A longing to weep, also, on the shoulder of a loving mother.

"Yvon Letellier, second prize for general excellence. . . ."

The ceremonies were over. The students rushed about, comparing their prizes. Some of the mothers congratulated each other; others demanded explanations from the reverend professors. Old Father Loupret at last succeeded in reaching Pierre, who was surrounded by schoolmates, and Pierre seized this chance to escape from the crowd. Deep down in his pocket his fingers stroked the violet ribbon which betokened his religious vocation, the ribbon he had publicly selected from the silver platter during the brief ceremony in which each student indicated his choice of profession, the ribbon he had chosen in face of the Letelliers' smiling contempt, and in the presence of Father Loupret's ecstatic joy. And it had seemed to him that he was committing an act of sacrilege.

In a tone of kindly command Father Loupret exclaimed, "Pierre, you're coming with me. I have a little bottle of red wine at the rectory. We must celebrate!"

"I can't, Father. I've got to go to the Grande Allée. I must see my mother."

"Of course! I understand," the priest sighed, as he regretfully watched the lad move off. Why, was Pierre

so pale? How upset he had sounded when he said, "I can't!"

Just as he reached the door, almost at a run, his prizes under his arm, Pierre was stopped by his strange new friend.

"Hey, there, Mr. Head-of-the-class! We're taking you to a restaurant! We find you more and more interesting."

Fernande was looking at him with laughing eyes. "Yes," she said, "you must come. Denis and I insist on it."

Pierre gazed at them distractedly. How happy everyone seemed! Weren't they aware that all afternoon he had, as was his way, butted his head against the worst that could happen, and that he was not through? Brusquely, he refused. "Not now. It's impossible. See you some other time."

Once more he was on his way when Father "Voltaire" grabbed his sleeve and drew him aside. "I absolutely must see you to-night, at half-past eight. Do you understand? And here is a sincere little gift, from your warmest friend."

It was only outdoors, on the sidewalk, that Pierre realized what "Voltaire" had slipped into his hand—a five-dollar bill.

Madame Letellier's Buick was hastily pulling out from the curb. Pierre dashed toward the Chateau Frontenac and plunged into a taxi. His voice was strained as he called out, "Grande Allée! I'll tell you where to stop."

Dully he stared at the volumes scattered over the seat beside him.

2

PIERRE had the driver stop behind the Letelliers' car, asked him to wait, and jumped to the sidewalk. He walked rapidly along the strip of concrete which crossed the lawn and led to the imposing brick structure, set back from the Grande Allée, where the Letelliers lived. Then, near the front steps, he slowed his pace. His eye had just fastened upon the half-open service door, next the garage.

The service door, the service doors of his childhood ! How often, tagging along behind his mother when she went to work, had he had to cross their thresholds—so often that to-day, a man, he had to summon strength from his wounded pride to turn his feet the other way. Through service doors, as a child, he had found his way into cellars where he discovered abandoned story-books, and these he had eagerly picked up and read, sitting near the furnace, until his mother, the afternoon done, came to get him—or else it had been the discarded tricycle, on which he had pedalled for an hour, till he had lost his breath and lost, too, the desire to have one for his own.

Pierre closed his eyes and then started up the steps. Would he ring the bell ? The cook or the maid would come to the door, and he would have to lose himself in explanations which would dissipate his wrath. The door was ajar. He pushed it gently and found himself standing on the thick rug in the front hall. It was the height of the ceiling which first struck him, then the wide, winding staircase, which in itself took as much room as a poor family's whole lodging. Standing on the second step, the coat she had just removed hanging on her arm, her back toward Pierre, the elegant Madame Letellier was saying to

her son, who was clambering to his room two steps at a time, "So now you're sulking? Answer me!"

The floor above resounded to the nervous movements of her spoiled boy. The widow's anguished face was intent, as though each footstep carried with it the promise of a gentle word. But no word came.

In the small parlour at Pierre's right, sitting near a round mahogany table, an old, white-haired lady was embroidering, and the sad nodding of her head made it clear that she was following the quarrel. She was Yvon's maternal grandmother. Suddenly she saw Pierre standing motionless. She laid aside her embroidery and came out to him. "Were you looking for someone?"

He twisted round, looked at her in bewilderment, and stammered, "I'm Pierre Boisjoly. I've come to get my mother."

The old woman's pinkish features, with their network of blue veins, lit up. Her wrinkles laughed. It was an aged person's way of blushing. For Yvon's grandmother was at once delighted to meet this talented young man on whose account she had so often reproached her daughter. She was ashamed to be the mother of a jealous woman who stooped to mean ways of belittling the success which angered her.

"I've come to get my mother," repeated Pierre, his glance darting everywhere in order to escape the silent plea for forgiveness that was writ large over the elderly face.

"Pierre! For heaven's sake! Didn't you use the service entrance?"

Pierre's mother had rushed from the drawing-room and was staring at him, horrified. Short, fattish, a little dishevelled, her face shining with a grey dusty sweat, she was twisting a cleaning-rag in her large, nervous fingers. Then she lifted a suppliant face toward Madame Letellier,

who had turned around and crossed her arms in front of her, remarking, "For a servant's son, the gentleman certainly makes himself at home!"

The cry which Pierre uttered at this moment was more like a shriek. "Come, Mother! Put on your coat! I don't want you to stay another instant in this filthy house!"

Quick steps shook the floor above, and Yvon Letellier appeared at the turn in the stairway, where the sight of Pierre brought him to a halt. Pierre clenched his fists, and it was the only movement made during the few seconds of silence that followed.

Almost beside herself, Madame Boisjoly desperately tried to relieve the tension. "Madame Letellier, I found a ten-dollar bill on the floor in Madame's room. . . ."

"Thank you, my good woman. You, at least, are honest. I like occasionally to prove my servants' honesty."

"Mother, come on!" Pierre shouted. "Never again shall you set foot in this place!"

Mother Boisjoly glanced in dismay at the lady of the house, a glance which meant to say: "Excuse him! It's not my fault. You won't tell me I can't work here any more, will you?" Then she ran to fetch her coat.

Up on the stairs Yvon Letellier did not budge. He would have liked, in his mother's presence, to lash Pierre with a biting phrase, but he felt that at the slightest provocation Pierre would have hurled himself up the stairs, his fists flying. At the back of the house the service door clattered shut. Pierre understood. His mother had left. He turned and went out.

"We certainly deserved that," was Yvon's final comment.

Dressed in slacks and a sports shirt, he rattled down the stairs without looking at his mother. When she saw him head for the door without turning back, without adding a word, she called his name in distress.

He stopped short, staring at her reflection in the plate glass of the front door, and then dryly said, "Yes?"

She advanced toward her son and asked him desolately, 'Can it be that you are taking that insolent brat's side against your own mother? Well—say something!"

"Yes, Mother dear, I'm all for his defending himself." His tone became cutting. "Even if he were the son of a tramp, it would make no difference. Politeness is still in order. He is a very powerful and very intelligent fellow. I don't like him. You have always pushed and spurred me on to defeat him, to surpass him, even to humiliate him. In my rivalry with him I have made use of tactics of which I am none too proud. I'm not sorry I did so, because I like winning, and all skilful means are good means. But you must grant that what you said to him to-day went a bit too far. He has a right to be furious. And then. . . ."

His ill temper left him for a moment, and his blue eyes became shadowy with indecision. Had he not been his mother's accomplice when, a little while ago, he had announced that Pierre would not be able to sing? And did not his impatience with his mother spring from the fact that Pierre had brought his scheme to naught and had even made him seem ridiculous in the eyes of the audience? Yvon felt weary, suddenly nauseated by the whole business. He grasped the handle of the door, avoiding his mother's fixed, protruding eyes.

Huguette Letellier stammered haltingly, "You dare say things like that to me? After all the love, the sacrifices, the slaving. . . ." She need not have spoken those words. Yvon knew very well the meaning of the anguish which, in a moment, had aged his mother by ten years. At forty-four she was still beautiful. A widow and rich at thirty-five, mother of a boy who by virtue of his looks and gifts was the little king of the Grande Allée, she had clamped herself over him like the shell of an oyster. Thrusting aside her

numerous suitors, even mild flirtations, she had given herself wholly to this child whose glory she would some day share. He was not merely to become a superior man; he would prove to the population of Quebec that he belonged to the race of great men. From his very first courses at the Minor Seminary, had not the professors agreed in granting him genius? Then this Pierre Boisjoly, son of her charwoman, this coarse-featured boy (his features were downright vulgar, to her maternal eye) had suddenly forged ahead of Yvon on the path which leads to success. Month by month, year by year, he had defeated Yvon in the struggle for first place; gradually he had tarnished the golden star for which Huguette Letellier had sacrificed her beauty, the golden star on which she had fastened all her future. And now Yvon, going off in a sports shirt to play tennis with the girls next door—the Senator's daughters—Yvon himself was accusing her of unfairness! She wrung her hands, and began to sob.

Yvon shook his head impatiently. "Please stop it, Mother. Your petticoat reign has come to an end. So let's drop the discussion. Your anger merely humiliates me!"

He was about to close the door behind him when he came back to say a final word. "I imagine you'll be leaving for Montreal, as you usually do when you want to sulk?"

After sightlessly contemplating for several long seconds the door now closed behind her son, Huguette Letellier began to pace the hall with short, quick steps, muttering between her teeth, "Yes, I'm leaving, I'm leaving! It's not worth my while to stay. And to think that I'd ordered a special supper for the two of us at the Chateau this evening! I'm leaving!"

During this interchange, the old lady had feverishly resumed her embroidery. She glanced sadly at her daughter, then found courage to say, "Poor child! I've often warned you. You've spoiled him altogether too much."

As though she had not heard her mother, Huguette continued with a sneer: "And to think that all this has happened because of that little climber who pretended he had a priest's vocation in order to get his pastor to pay for his studies! The little cheat. . . ."

The old lady laid down her embroidery and came close to her daughter. "You say that young Boisjoly is not going to be a priest?"

Surprised at her mother's interruption, Huguette answered truculently, "So he led me to understand. And you should have seen with what arrogance! Naturally I have suspected for years the game he was playing."

The old woman did not reply, and looked fixedly at her daughter, her eyes filled with growing terror. In a voice almost inaudible she was finally able to express her dread.

"Huguette. Are you sure that your attitude toward him has not ruined his vocation, that from the good priest he might have become he will not, through your fault, turn into a resentful and wicked fellow?"

Huguette's face hardened, and she let her arms fall to her sides. "What? You too? At my age, Mother, I assure you, I do not want to listen to any of your sermonizing."

Her mother lowered her head and went back to her embroidery. Widow of a simple government employee, she had seen both her daughters marry into money. As she sat down near her work-table, she said wearily: "I think it's wise of you to go spend the week-end with your sister Yvonne in Montreal. You get on well together. It will do you good."

And under her breath she murmured tremulously to herself, "I must write that young man, I must see him. I must!"

It seemed to Pierre that the humming of the taxi's motor was the only sound he had heard for hours. Not that he felt himself finally clear of the crisis that was shattering his life, thrusting him into the unknown like a leaf swept along by a strident wind : each passing minute tightened his commitment to a fate which some mysterious power kept urging him to embrace. He was already so deeply involved in this fate that now he was once more beginning to be aware of the world around him. At last he turned toward his mother, who was separated from him by the prizes heaped against the back of the seat ; her heavy hands, hardened by water and toil, held upon her knees the big shopping-bag, now empty, which usually she brought back in triumph to their lodgings, filled with her employers' gifts. She watched Pierre with her weary eyes, at the moment wide with astonishment, distress, and reproach.

" Pierre," she said, " whatever has gotten into you ? "

He did not answer at once but looked at the books, and then again at his mother. The taxi was going fast, and behind her head, in the background, the lamp-posts and buildings sped furtively by, quick and shameful like the thoughts that flashed through his feverish brain. Was this his mother, this woman of fifty, shallow-minded, knowing nothing of the ideal, happy at seeing a floor shine because of her efforts whose only apparent ambition was to be sure till she died of three meals a day and the few spare dollars that enabled her, twice a week, to meet her garrulous cronies at the parish bingo parties ? This stranger was his mother ; and had it not been that they shared a home, he would not have known at what street-corner to drop her off in silence. How was it that an hour earlier he could have done murder for her sake ? Had he then deceived himself as to the true nature of his impulses ? Pierre thought he felt a cold sweat at the roots of his hair. His teacher had been right : only on the road to the priesthood

are there permanent signposts that never mislead. He had quit this road for the virgin forest and already he was losing his way. But also there was that head—Fernande's head—bending with the strokes of her comb, and there was Madame Letellier, who had tormented him and who, to humiliate him, had that very day made his mother work. Again Pierre felt himself swell to great stature, ready to smash everything, like those invincible cinema heroes who surmount all obstacles.

The charwoman nervously fingered her shopping-bag. "Now it's all over," she said, "she'll persuade her friends that I've stolen from her. I guess this afternoon's lost me all my ladies."

"And you regret it?"

"Well . . . I'm a widow; I have to earn something. Oh! I know well enough that she made me work to-day to stop me going to the prize-giving. I'm not that much of a fool, you know. But I wouldn't have gone anyway. I wouldn't have wanted to shame you. A number of my ladies were there, too, and they might have thought I came to sauce them. So I figured I might just as well work, you see. But with what's happened now I might as well have gone, seeing as I'm no better off anyway."

"Mother!"

The cleaning-woman had not heard Pierre's exclamation of pain, which he could barely whisper. Her large eyes with their lost look groped along a rocky path of thought.

"But seeing you came to get me. . . . Well, you decided that had gone on long enough. So now I must look for work scrubbing floors in the government offices. But that takes a bit of pull. And it worries me. You know your brother Joseph will never be the one to support me. He's a fireman, right enough, but all his money goes on cards. And you're going to make a priest. That's a fine thing, but it doesn't bring in much for a widowed mother. I've never heard tell

that the Archdiocese pays us a pension. Say, this taxi's going to cost us all of a dollar ! ”

Pierre thrust himself close to his mother and feverishly clutched her hands. “ Mama ! ” “ Don't worry any more about the future. I'm not going to be a priest ! ”

3

IN her cramped kitchen Mother Boisjoly was setting the table and preparing supper with embarrassed haste, as though she wished to excuse herself for not being able to offer her two sons the ritual of a full-fledged family meal. And to think of the news Pierre had just given her !

When he had informed her in the taxi of his decision, the charwoman had had almost no reaction. She was, at the time, too exhausted by the events of the day. Pierre's theatrical appearance at the Letelliers' had merely stirred her weariness, as you might stir dirty water. " Mama, I'm not going to be a priest ! " At first blush, in the depths of her fatigue, it had seemed to her a matter of little moment. Then, as the seconds had passed, she had felt herself flooded by a great feeling of tranquillity, the tranquillity that comes from a good balance in one's bank account. Madame Boisjoly's whole life was responsible for this trivial reaction to the terrible drama through which her son was fighting this way.

At fourteen she had begun to work in a factory, twelve hours a day. Each week her father eagerly snatched her pay envelope, giving her back a few pennies. Then she had married a drunken fireman who, after they had been together eleven years, was killed in an accident, leaving her with two children, Joseph and Pierre. To meet the rent, she had had to become a cleaning-woman even while her husband was alive, and she had continued ever since, because Joseph, a fireman in his turn, lost his earnings at cards just as his father had squandered his in the tavern. Eva Boisjoly had never had the time to be happy, except at those bingo parties where she stole a little ease against

the pains of the morrow. Her eyes always fixed upon the dates when payments came due, she had never felt the satisfaction of other mothers who saw their sons choosing the priestly vocation. And this evening, while Pierre, his brawny arm bent awkwardly to reach his right cheek, was nervously shaving himself in front of the mirror hung above the tin sink, Eva Boisjoly wanted to sing, so happily did the figures of the family budget now rearrange themselves in the rudimentary adding-machine her brain had become.

It was while she dreamed of these joyful figures that the thought of Madame Letellier's bedroom came back to her. "Pierre. If we could become as rich as the Letelliers, think how good our life would be! I'd take a few little trips to Montreal myself! You know, in her room there was a ten-dollar bill lying on the floor, but . . . let me tell you; there was a package of others in the little box on the chest of drawers. It was a fine sight. If there aren't a thousand dollars there. . . ."

Smilingly she looked at Pierre's broad back, and the powerful neck emerging from his cotton undershirt. The picture of his father! But Pierre did not drink, did not gamble, and he was the most intelligent young man at the Minor Seminary. She was not hurt at Pierre's silence, although he seemed to pay no attention to what she was saying. In poor households like theirs it often happened that children did not answer their mothers. But she had not noticed that at the mention of the money the muscles of her son's back twitched slightly.

How cut off, how much a stranger he was in this house and in the presence of his mother! In the cab he had briefly hoped that she would understand his fevered state, or at least would try to fit her feelings to his own. Nothing, or only a few petty calculations, livened her worn features. He remained alone with his longing to throw himself into

someone's arms and weep. Why was he shaving? He had already cleaned off his youthful beard that noon. A few minutes back he had quite mechanically picked up the razor, as though he wanted to tear from his face the last remnants of the mask he had unknowingly worn for years. Had he not at last proclaimed the decision which had obsessed him since this afternoon? How contemptible he was! He belonged to the breed of those who, from childhood, need a reason for living, and he had fastened to that which best strikes the child's imagination: the ideal of a religious calling. And now, when the moment had come to confront his life as a man, he was quitting the convenient ideal that had enabled him to cross the desert of adolescence. Vigorously he shook his head: no, he had not acted the part of having a religious vocation with the ulterior motives of which children are capable. He had been pure in heart.

Suddenly Madame Boisjoly stopped sniffing and scratched her forehead. "Good Father Loupret's the one who will be disappointed. He's spent at least a thousand dollars on your schooling."

In the mirror Pierre saw his pupils widen. Abruptly he threw the towel over his shoulder and sought refuge in his own room, which was separated from the kitchen by a curtain. He wanted to sink down on his bed, his fists on his knees and his face thrust between his fists, but the sight of his seminarist's uniform, carefully laid out on the mattress, held him back. The wide green belt, the navy-blue costume, worn and shiny, and his cap lying on it, froze him; he thought of the hat he had seen posed upon the caquet at military funerals.

Pierre hurled the uniform and the prizes into a cupboard that had been made from a packing-case and covered with cretonne. The small, ink-stained desk near the window was made from a packing-case, too. He looked at the worn linoleum on the floor, the pale pink-tinted paper of

the crazed walls. Until then his eyes had avoided the bleeding figure of Goya's Christ pinned above his work-desk. Suddenly he moved toward it, seized the desk with both hands, and looked at it ardently.

"Lord, I have always been open with You ! You know I have. And I still am !"

His outburst had ended in a murmur, for it seemed to him that Christ's head was blurring, disappearing into the wall, and that his own voice rang false. From the kitchen Madame Boisjoly called : " Did you speak to me, Pierre ? "

He did not answer. True enough, Father Loupret had certainly spent a thousand dollars on him during the last few years. The thought was not to be borne. He must rush at once to the good priest's residence and tell him everything, headlong. Pierre recognized himself : whenever suffering to be endured came within sight, he rushed toward it to grasp it in a possessive embrace. He had always believed that this thirst to put himself to the proof came to him from his religious vocation. And this same vocation had made him relegate to another world that need for money which caused all his mother's struggles. And yet Pierre had never thought himself ungrateful. The idea of being a priest had possessed him, absolutely, for years, and of what was hidden by the blinders of his sacerdotal goal he had seen nothing, felt nothing.

Pierre returned to the kitchen, tucking in his shirt. He explained quickly, with sudden concern, " Yes, I was telling you not to make my soup too hot. I'm in a hurry."

The emptied can lay near Pierre's plate on the half-unfolded tablecloth. At this instant Joseph, the twenty-seven-year-old fireman brother, walked in. Dressed in his blue uniform, his lunch-box under his arm, he scanned the kitchen with a bantering eye. Joseph was as chubby as a goose. Hating fires and excitement, he had caught two diseases in the rocking-chairs of the fire station—obesity

and a passion for cards. He dropped his box in a corner and sat down at the table.

“Three cheers for vacations! Our gentleman can take his ease for a while!”

Pierre looked at his brother's uniform, then let his spoon drop into his plate. Father Loupret's face, illumined with joy, came back before his eyes. When he was alone with Pierre, that worthy priest, usually aloof with his parishioners, became as gay as a child and would boyishly exclaim, “You, Pierre, are going to be a priest of the sort we must have in the twentieth century!”

Pierre rose from the table, slipping on his coat as he left. “I'm not hungry,” he said.

And Madame Boisjoly told Joseph the big news, and Joseph made a few vulgar quips about it.

“Father. The ladies of the choir would like to talk to you. . It's about the new organist.”

“To the devil with . . .”

With his free hand Father Loupret dismissed his sacristan, who had ferreted him out in his bathroom where he was in the process of shaving.

“Tell them it's out of the question this evening. I am expecting a person of great importance. Put them off till to-morrow.”

The priest, his collar laid aside and his back bent, was wiping soap and grey hairs from the blade of his razor on a page torn from some old religious periodical. He shrugged his shoulders. Who could think of spoiling a day like this by a stupid discussion with the choir ladies? His arm rose once again, the razor poised an inch or two from the face as though the hand were preparing a plan of attack which would enable the blade to negotiate all those deep wrinkles. Aristide Loupret was really planning nothing at all. He studied his happy features, covered with the gay white

lather. His eyes were full of laughter. He whispered, "You're in the process of fashioning a cardinal." And the toothless mouth reflected in the mirror went further: "It is you, Aristide, who will have shaped him with your own hands, this cardinal. Ho!"

He replaced his collar and proudly straightened his shoulders. "Let every pastor, the world over," thought he, "discover his Pierre Boisjoly, and the spiritual future of Christendom won't worry me." In his opinion, Christendom, unfortunately, seemed to be satisfied with thousands of grown-up choirboys whom events would sweep aside like puppets. Impatiently the priest consulted his big watch. Seven o'clock. Pierre must be coming soon. He smiled. What a lad! The old man stretched out in his arm-chair, took a cigar and, before lighting it, began to hum *Notre-Dame du Canada*.

The priest drew heavy draughts of smoke, and his eyes followed the grey vapour until it lost itself in the air. Aristide Loupret had always given proof of astonishing foresight. Forty years earlier, when he was preparing for the priesthood, the Quebec clergy seemed to take it for granted that the apostolate of its priests should be planned in relation to the agricultural future envisaged for the Province. No young neophyte glimpsed any other field of action for himself than a shabby pastorate in some remote new settlement, a life of struggle against difficulties clearly defined in advance. The city posts were reserved for priests with influential connections, and their function was, above all, to come to terms with the Government.

Young Father Loupret had been one of the first to point out the error of this conception and to understand that the most important apostolate would lie in the cities, toward which a large portion of the agricultural class was already gravitating. The farmer turned worker, the over-population of the large centres, raised new problems for which the

clergy was insufficiently prepared. Aristide Loupret immediately went to the heart of these problems, and for a number of years devoted his tireless energies to opening his colleagues' and superiors' eyes, to setting up points of contact between the clergy and the industrial class. He did not escape the danger that haunts competent men working within an institution which they improve by their zeal and their initiative ; by way of reward he was named administrator—that is, pastor—of a large parish in Quebec. The stirring adventure had ended in tedious arguments with thick-headed wardens, in a welter of accounts payable and receivable. His spiritual ministry? This parish was so incurably bigoted that he felt as useless as a heart-specialist planted for life amidst five thousand people the worst of whose illnesses was a common cold.

Throughout these dull years, Father Loupret, to deepen his comprehension, had taken advantage of every brief opportunity allowed him by the over-burdening routine of his task as administrator. Despite everything, he kept his eyes open. To what point did the growing danger of Communism threaten the world? And how far, he wondered, would go those currents of free thought he saw taking shape among the people, leading men and women more and more to regard the clergy as a vast network of religious bureaucrats, most of them book-keepers who knew exactly how to balance the individual items and the sum total owed by souls to God—with a precise figure for the generous percentage that should go to the Church. The clergy of the Province of Quebec, particularly, thought Aristide Loupret, did not sufficiently fear the brewing storm. They considered it enough to produce safe priests by the dozen—the sort that choose the priesthood as others choose the law—when it was time, now or never, to shape apostles who would be able, by their intelligence, their cultivation, and their faith, to illuminate the stream of contemporary

thought and to spiritualize the working of the Catholic machine. "What we need," Father Loupret kept reiterating to every priest who would listen, "is not a thousand ordinary men but a handful of great men, and all will be well !"

Then it was that he began to watch the most brilliant children of his parish. Most of the recruits whom he managed to steer into the Minor Seminary came from poor families, and the worthy pastor had to foot the bill for their studies. What discussions with the wardens, what financial wonders had been necessary to meet these expenses ! Father Loupret's experiment had almost come to naught. Young boys who, at thirteen, had shown a burning zeal, a lively intelligence, had gone flat at puberty, become chatterboxes about the time they began their philosophy course, and reached the diaconate with such a baggage of worldly wisdom that they retained barely enough zeal to say their Mass and read the Breviary. As for those brilliant boys who had cost him so dear, those lads who headed their classes and who, at the end of their general preparatory course, informed him by letter that the priesthood was not their vocation—Father Loupret preferred not to think of them. But then, what did these disappointments matter—he had Pierre Boisjoly. Pierre ! Pierre ! His cardinal to be.

For some time he had watched him, this child of ten who accompanied his mother when she went to work as a char-woman. One day he had approached the little fellow as he sat on the edge of the sidewalk absorbed in a book spattered with ink-spots. "What are you reading, my child ?"

Pierre had jumped, half standing up, and backed away in shy timidity. The pastor smiled kindly and repeated his question. The little boy gasped, and then replied in a tone which mingled defiance and fear, "*La Fontaine's Fables !*"

Aristide Loupret gently took the book from the child's hands, leafing it through with interest. "Learned men say that it's the most interesting book there is. Would you like to become a learned man? . . . You're not too talkative. Tell me, do you know one of these fables by heart?"

Father Loupret would never forget that moment when the sudden and wonderful flame illumined the urchin's eyes as he began to recite, without the least hesitation and for a quarter hour, the fables which had so struck his child's mind. The old man had stood dumbfounded. To think of it! For years he had vainly sought gold amidst the crannies of his great parish, only to find it suddenly in the glance of this unkempt boy sitting on the sidewalk's edge. Deeply stirred, he had asked him his name.

It was this incident which brought Pierre into the centre of the priest's dearest hopes. The old man easily succeeded in peopling the virgin heart with stirring religious imagery, in enflaming it with divine zeal. He had the lad enrolled at the Minor Seminary. What an intelligence! It swept everything before it. What purity, what probity! Even the hard journey through puberty had not tarnished his heart. On the contrary, it seemed to increase this adolescent's moral and intellectual power. Philosophy, literature, mathematics—Pierre mastered them all. His personality outran them. Ever since his discovery of Pierre, Father Loupret had known the happiness of one who brings a vast task to a good outcome.

The awaited moment was at hand. Next year Pierre would enter the Major Seminary. The old pastor joined his hands in a fervent prayer: "God, grant me to live to see him ordained!" The cigar ash had fallen and spilled over his cassock. Then he hastily drew himself erect. The doorbell was ringing!

All his muscles tense, Pierre almost stamped with eager-

ness at the presbytery door. O, let it open, let Father Loupret come, and let this pain at last be over ! Back home, just now, with his mother near him, his fever had almost changed into weariness. Now the crisis had returned, more acute than ever. In the wilderness the soul's torments turn to boredom ; upon contact with beings capable of understanding them our troubles flare anew.

Furtively the pastor opened the door to the accomplice of his happiness, but did not waste effort in exclamations. Too sure, too impatient, had been the fashion in which he had awaited Pierre. He barely took the time to utter a quick, restrained, conventional, " Oh, it's you ; come in," then he jogged down the hall, the young man at his heels, without noticing his tragic expression. A large photograph of Pius XII faced the desk. The pastor raised his eyes toward it, took Pierre's arm, and stood still, moved by the noble face. Then he murmured fervently, " Thank God, at least we have the Pope needed for our day. What a man ! What a saint ! And what cultivation ! "

Father Loupret lowered his head. Eyes alight with the exalted words he had just uttered, he carefully closed the office door behind Pierre, emitted a sigh which might have been a cheer, and led his protégé toward a leather arm-chair, as though this big lad were an object of art he was absent-mindedly placing upon a pedestal. Mechanically Aristide Loupret fished out the bottle of Bordeaux hidden in the upper drawer of a steel filing-cabinet, behind a pile of records. His back turned on Pierre, he opened the drawer slowly, savouring the seconds, even lengthening them, the more intensely to rejoice on this great day. His Pierre was drawing near the priesthood with a burst of triumph, he was drawing near it the way he himself had willed, planned for, he, Aristide Loupret, a simple, open-hearted priest. And the memorable sentence came back to mind " Aristide, you have him at last, your cardinal ! "

Those were the words the priest was letting melt on his tongue, his eyes slyly lowered to the glasses he was filling, when Pierre's outcry—hoarse, close to frenzy—froze him. "I'm not thirsty!"

"You aren't thirsty?"

Father Loupçret had suddenly noticed Pierre's lost expression: in a flash he had seen the dreadful moment hovering over him, and he tried to avoid it with the foolish tactics of an ostrich. In a voice soft and friendly, completely out of tune with Pierre's distracted state, he repeated, "You really aren't thirsty?"

Pierre had hurled himself toward the desk (face to face with the bottle of Bordeaux, thought the pastor); then, standing rigid, deathly pale, his fists clenched beside his thighs, he continued in an exasperated voice, torn between sobs and shame, "I have been honest with you, I have never lied to you. I don't know what has happened to me. It came over me suddenly, this afternoon. I'll repay you all the money, every last cent. Tell me how little use you have for me, right away. I want you to; don't wait until later, when I've left. Quick, hurry, Father!"

He burst into short, dry, ridiculous sobs, and turned back to his chair. The aged priest continued to protect himself against the collapse of his dreams by keeping busy with little automatic gestures. He poured back what was in the glasses and put the bottle away, all without haste, then carefully closed the drawer of the filing-cabinet. His fingers had touched the bottle, the cabinet, and had felt neither glass nor steel. He had bitten his lower lip, and he had not known it. He sat down at his desk, looked at the Pope's photograph, and murmured evenly, "It's finished. At least you didn't let me know by letter."

Then he shivered violently, as old men do, and seemed to shrivel. In the prism of Pierre's confused vision, this be-cassocked corpse, which had just laid aside a radiant dream,

looked like a mussed bit of clothing which slowly subsides in the corner where it has been thrown.

"I should have liked it better if you'd been my father. It would have been less hard to hurt you this way."

Pierre's words did not penetrate the old priest's mind. The arguments which might persuade Pierre to change his decision did not pass his lips. This was not a single game that the pastor was losing; it was the entirety of his happiness. He attempted a wan smile, which only emphasized his beaten look. "To whom will you now recite La Fontaine's *Fables*?" he murmured.

Pierre had straightened up, his eyes wild, as though sheer violence could rid him of this unbearable attitude on the part of his benefactor.

"To all who ask me, and in whom I have faith."

"Do you want to be a lawyer? How will you pay for your studies?"

Pierre almost sighed with satisfaction. At last Father Loupret was awakening from his trance; he would, likely enough, shower him with righteous indignation. Without thinking, Pierre quickly turned to the words, the phrases that provoke scorn. "I've just told you. All your money will be paid back to the last cent, and more, too. I'll earn my tuition with the sweat of my brow! You know me."

The aged priest, trembling with indignant pain, stepped quickly around the desk, grasped Pierre by the arms, and began to shake him as he might shake inattentive children during catechism classes. His sentences fell jerkily on Pierre, like quick blows from a whip, dry and contemptuous. "Is it you, Pierre, who talk this way, like a repentant grocer's boy who has robbed his employer? As though money were at stake? A thing within the grasp of every idiot!"

Ashen pale, the priest breathed quickly. Now it was

Pierre who trembled. His knees bent ; then he sank sobbing to the floor at Father Loupret's feet, begging in a stifled voice, " Don't say that ! I didn't mean a word of it. I am unhappy, and I feel the need to disgrace myself, to complete my shame ! "

The old man slowly passed his stubby, wrinkled hand over Pierre's forehead and said quietly, in a voice the latter had never heard, the voice of a loving father, " I know all that, my little Pierre. I am properly punished for my pride. I had made up my mind to make a priest of you, and because you have a great soul, you were willing to live and to feel as I wanted. But that is all over, and I understand. God it is Who has intervened at the right moment. You want to battle, face to face, with men ? Oh, I know the whole Letellier business. It is God who set them in the path of my plans, and at last my eyes are opened. Pierre, I'll keep on paying for your education."

" No ! "

" Come, come ! You'll become famous, most assuredly. But you will see, in life, that nothing equals the joy of being dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and to Christ."

" Oh, please, forget all I've said. I've been a fool. I *will* be a priest ! "

Pierre had straightened up, his eyes afire. The fever of the apostolate had suddenly recaptured him, in a gust of happiness.

Atistide Loupret now spoke against his every inclination. " No ; that would be to take advantage of a moment's noble impulse. To-morrow your doubts would overcome you again. One must go to the Major Seminary filled with love and quietness of spirit."

" I don't want to give you any more pain ! "

A trifle brusquely the old priest pushed Pierre toward the door which stood ajar. " Go, I tell you, and have a good vacation. Perhaps your troubles will cure themselves. As

for the pains old priests suffer, I suppose they are needful. Go, Pierre."

Aristide Loupret had quickly shut the door behind Pierre. He sat down at his desk and laid his head upon his folded arms. Then, an instant or two later, he raised his ravaged face, his eyes stagnant as death. He took his rosary, knelt down, and recited it. Then he rang for the sexton.

"Are those ladies still in the organ loft? Well, then, good enough; tell them that they can see me this evening."

4

WITHOUT knowing exactly why, Pierre took to his heels as soon as he had passed the lattice fence that surrounded the presbytery. The farther his legs carried him from the priest's house, the more was he elated by the excitement of successful flight ; yet, spurred on as he was by some mysterious force toward the unknown, and despite the clamour in his mind, he was able to realize with astonishment that he had been hoping for Father Loupret's death, so that the old priest's suffering might be cut short. His natural decency rebelled at once against the thought, and moved him to reconsider the sorrow into which he had just cast his benefactor. But Pierre was already far from the presbytery, he was nineteen, the exertion of running had scarcely put him out of breath, and here he was in the very heart of the beloved city he wanted to conquer. Father Loupret's sorrow, unbearable a few moments earlier to his pure young heart, was melting now in the joy of his surroundings—just as, that afternoon, on the far wall of the assembly hall, the crucifix had withdrawn itself from the intensity of his searching eyes. Puzzled, Pierre shook his head ; then he breathed deeply, and loosened his necktie.

Youville Square buzzed with happy activity. The many-coloured buses, usually so jittery, this evening seemed to exchange their passengers in a mechanical flirtation emphasized by the winking traffic lights, enlivened by the bright hues of dresses and suits, and orchestrated by joyful human voices. Cars and pedestrians seemed to come to this square in order to discharge their burden of sound, so that later on, whatever direction they might choose to take, they could rejoice in the silence of these first summer

evenings. Close at hand stood St. John's Gate, outlining its crenellated arch in the twilight ; to the left, the Capitol Theatre, whose illuminated posters arrested the casual passers-by ; to the right, the Palais Montcalm, and, above them all, belfries and clouds. Behind the fortifications old Quebec, all angles and slanting roofs, gave utterance to its poetry, bathed in shadows and half-tints, and graciously allowed a little of the savour and charm of its Latin Quarter to drift out along St. John Street, beyond the gates, toward the western stretches of the city. A gust of spring air, come from the river and homesick for the Latin Quarter, sank into the tortuous channel of St. John Street and came gently to stroke Pierre's face as he stood, still one enchanted, at the edge of Youville Square. He did not yet dare say to himself, " Life is mine ! " but he felt surge within him such strength, such will to do battle, to conquer and to live, that his arms almost made the gesture of embracing the whole spectacle. Two young girls in cotton dresses, bare-legged and shod in sandals, passed near him, softly singing, " When the fine days come, we shall go. . ." The sound of their voices faded away.

Where, indeed, was he headed, toward what had he run so fast ? For if he had fled away from the priest's house, he had also run toward something. Until to-day his life had been limited to a single round : the presbytery, his home, the Minor Seminary. Because he had, if only for a moment, quit this accustomed path, he saw his fate turned inside out. It had all begun with that fellow named Denis, and that Fernande—her eyes, her hair, her dressing-gown, her voice. Fernande ! His heart beat faster. Why had he been asking himself questions, pretending astonishment at the inexorable mechanism of events, ever since this afternoon ? His flight was carrying him toward the Latin Quarter. To Denis's dwelling ? Not, not at once. First to Father Lippé's. Did he not know—and precisely—that

(he rehearsed it all in his mind) at the moment when Father Loupret had begged him to go to the presbytery after the distribution of the prizes, and when Father Lippé and Denis had given him their invitations, he had already consciously settled the course of the events which were now transpiring? The visit to the Letelliers' had hallowed his anger and prepared the blow that was to be dealt Father Loupret. To welcome the guilty one and dispel his last shreds of remorse, Father Lippé had then been the chosen vessel; and finally, Father Lippé would let him fall into the hands of his new friends—a new man, ready to come to grips with life.

Pierre shook his head. It was not true; he was no such infamous schemer. It was the Devil who had come to punish him, to give a hidden and monstrous meaning to things he had done in the midst of a dreadful crisis. He started off for the Minor Seminary.

When he reached the Latin Quarter, he hesitated at the entrance to that street which, for so many years, had seen him mechanically making his way to his classes. In the gathering dusk he really saw it for the first time, that street where Fernande lived. Its pavement sloped a trifle; its jagged outline followed the walls of the ancient dwellings, which were so haphazardly placed and bonneted that they looked as though they were on a drunken spree, their pointed roofs shoved down over their façades, or pushed back at a jaunty angle. "No!" said Pierre to himself, "I'll take Ramparts Street." The vigour with which he made up his mind rekindled his fever, which had been soothed for a while by the light-heartedness of the summer evening. As he raced along beside the ancient cannon which edge Ramparts Street, he thought that perhaps Father Lippé would cure him of his folly, would set flowing again in his heart the cool spring which up until that day had satisfied his thirst. Triumphant then, Pierre would

not go to see his new friends, would forget them forever, and would end the evening on the Quebec-Levis ferry, whose lights twinkled below upon the river. Then he would go find Father Loupret and say, "It was all a mistake." And then the dear old man would so happy.

He crossed the courtyard of the Minor Seminary at a run, and his footfalls seemed to release deafening echoes. School courtyards are crushed beneath so heavy a silence, once the first day of vacation has come ; they are flanked by long balconies, along which clerics glide back and forth, their hands behind their backs. Pierre plunged past the old door and in the half-darkness quickly made his way through the corridors and up the stairs whose well-worn woodwork he knew by heart. He muttered, unconsciously, the names of the classrooms he passed, and took pleasure in breathing the smell of ink, the shut-in smell, because these were the smells of his scholastic victories.

Quickly he reached the floor where the faculty priests had their rooms, but since he had never before invaded its precincts, he spent a few moments looking for Father Lippé's name-plate on the lintel of one of the many doors. Suddenly he cocked his ear. The sound of a voice which he recognized as Father Lippé's reverberated from the end of the hall. As Pierre approached, the trouble that was wrinkling his face gave way rapidly to astonishment.

Father Lippé was reciting the opening lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*, but in what extraordinary fashion ! The voice now came through distinctly, beating out the rhythm like a metronome, and ending each verse with either a " One ! " or a " Two ! "

" *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris (ONE !)*
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit (TWO !)
Litora. Multum ille et terris jactatus et alto (ONE !)
Vi Superum, saeve memorem Junonis ob iram ; (TWO !) "

His curiosity aroused, Pierre at last dared venture a knock. Without changing intonation, Father Lippé cried :
“ *Ietra, Petre !*

“ *Multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem. (ONE !).*”

At the sight that confronted him Pierre looked as startled as he had when he beheld the two-headed woman, the first time his mother took him to the sideshows at the Provincial Exposition. Bare-footed and dressed in drawers and a sports sweater, Father Lippé, with the composure of an Indian fakir, was doing gymnastics to the count of the Latin verses. When Pierre entered the priest's bare toes were supporting his weight ; his long legs were bent, and his arms outstretched. Solemnly, without glancing at Pierre, he resumed his normal position while reciting another verse :

“ *Inferretque deso Latio : genus unde Latinum; (TWO !)*

“ *Petre*, like a good student, recite the next line ; it's a fine one.”

Gaping, Pierre stammered :

“ *Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae.*”

“ Perfect, my boy.”

Father Jerome Lippé took two long breaths, wriggled his thin shoulders, which protruded like posts from his narrow trunk, tested the suppleness of his legs by a few quick movements, and then, smiling, his hand outstretched, advanced toward the dumbfounded young man. He made him sit down like an invalid in an arm-chair upholstered with worn brown plush, and delivered this brief speech :

“ I love calisthenics ; I find them indispensable for the proper functioning of the mind. Just like Latin, I wish

they had been a Roman legacy, but, alas ! The Romans had no use for them, busying themselves instead at killing or being killed in war, or living and dying as patricians weighed down by their own bellies. It is to the pagans of Greece that we owe the tradition of physical exercises, and Solon the Wise knew their importance, since he caused to be built at Athens, Ephesus, and Hierapolis gymnasia in which, next to the space reserved for bodily training, there were baths, as well as halls for the philosophers and teachers of rhetoric. While the fine flower of Hellenic youth perfected the harmony of their figures, the intellectuals intoned the verses of Sappho and sometimes joined the young men in their wrestling, rope-skipping, or the hurling of discus and javelin. Restrained in all things, I find it hard to envisage myself throwing discus or javelin, all alone in the courtyard of the Minor Seminary, and I content myself, within the four walls of my room, by maintaining the discreet elasticity of my muscles through exercises at which the modest Aristotle himself would not have blushed. Why do I recite Latin verses ? For four very simple reasons :

“(a) As a breathing exercise.

“(b) Because the harmony of Latin verse gives even greater nobility to movement.

“(c) Because in devoting myself to a practice of pagan origin, I suffer a feeling of guilt which my inclinations toward Jesuitry spur me to relieve by reciting in the language in which I say Mass (just as you might toss holy water over the hammer and sickle). And

“(d) To have my next-door neighbour, that flabby, fat Father Benoît, who is inclined to complain at the noise I make, believe I am reciting my Breviary aloud. “Amen.”

With a springing step, Father Lippé went to close his window, which had been flung wide over the spectacle of the harbour. A military cot, above which hung his photograph, taken in the dress of an army chaplain, was lined

up between his chest of drawers and his bookcase. In the centre of the room, facing Pierre, a camera perched upon a tripod. Despite a bafflement which almost prevented him from thinking, Pierre could not avoid an astonished glance at the two walls covered with photographs, some of priests and others of young soldiers. With the same springing movements, Father Lippé bent over the camera, which he aimed at Pierre.

"There we are," said he, seating himself. "The light will be perfect, and it will make me a fine close-up. A cigarette? Oh, true you don't smoke yet. Let's not talk too loud—that good Father Benoît, you understand! He would cry to high heaven were he to hear me ramble on in such fashion, for from the depths of his layers of fat he sees Catholicism through a baby-pink cloud. He would love to know what goes on in this room, this mysterious laboratory of crazy incantations and odd practices."

As he said these words Father Lippé donned his slippers and crossed his legs. He was in good form this evening, Father "Voltaire." Was not this intelligent young man with eyes full of amazement the finest prey that his need to astonish had found in a long time? Surprising others was Father "Voltaire's" favourite sport, and it seemed as though his physical exercises had made him particularly keen. He arose and extended a prophetic arm.

"Look!" said he. "Photography is a great art. Here they think I'm a little mad, to devote myself to it with so much fervour, but come close and look carefully at these photos on my Wall 'A.' Come see. Wall 'A' is that of physiognomies signifying nothing. Look at this soldier. I knew him at a camp near London. He has since become a lieutenant-colonel. Isn't it true that he has the face of a man blowing up a balloon? And these five young priests! You'll keep this like the secrets of the confessional, won't you? But consider those faces! They're soft, dull, insipid.

At thirty-five they'll have folds of fat under the armpits and on their fingers, and when I reflect that we produce dozens like them and that we shall lean upon them as leaders during the difficult years to come, I tremble. Don't you tremble, too? And when I photograph them, they simper at me, they insist upon smoothing down their hair with water, upon fashioning themselves bangs and looking pleasant—they who purse their lips at my eccentricities. But when they're sitting for me, they find me marvellous, ask me to start all over again when the photo does not flatter them enough, and then beg prints from me without paying for them. Edifying, isn't it? And here's a Lord Bishop. You never knew him. His photo needs no commentary."

Pierre was beginning to be revolted by this priest in running-shorts who seemed to take savage pleasure in destroying the feelings of respect he cherished for members of the clergy. Father Lippé divined this reaction and hopped to the other wall.

"Blush, Pierre; you are right. You think I'm anti-clerical, don't you? No, I am a photographer and I have eyes. Now to Wall 'B'! That's where I want to place your portrait. You see this boy with eyes afire, thin lips, and decided chin? He went before the firing-squad in camp because he defended himself against a sergeant who had made a butt of him. It's true that he beat the sergeant to death. And the noble countenance of this priest! See the shining strength of his eyes, his fine forehead. How he carries his head! He has the neck of a Greek. He was to be named rector of one of our universities, but he contemplated a few drastic reforms in teaching and he was appointed pastor of a newly settled parish in the hinterland. Pierre, sit down there; I am ready. I shall take your photo, and for once I hope to begin a long series of fine ones."

The priest, his eyes flashing with enthusiasm, approached Pierre and lifted up his chin. "Strange! If I hide the mouth and look only at the upper part of the face, I read an expression of fierce determination, and if I look at the mouth, the sensual mouth, I have to grant that I am struck by its sadness and its disillusionment. I suppose that it is this unusual mixture which makes the face so striking."

The priest stepped back and, still holding the chin in his hand, began to study Pierre at length. Pierre's pulse beat harder, as though a doctor were listening to his heart. Upon his embarrassment there began to be grafted an anger he could not explain to himself. Perhaps Father Lippé, in his outlandish attire, was treating too cavalierly a vocation which Pierre was abandoning with such anguish? Pierre wanted to leave, without saying a word.

"Yes," Father Lippé concluded, "you'll have an extraordinary face as a priest."

"Father, I shall not be a priest," Pierre said curtly.

He held his breath. Father Lippé paled, made no answer, and quickly disappeared into the closet that opened from his room. He returned dressed in his cassock. The priest's face, a moment before sparkling with playful malice, had become stamped with seriousness and nobility. A moment earlier, Pierre had almost held him in scorn; now he felt himself very small and guilty before this man clad in dignity. Pierre hastily added, "I don't know what took hold of me. It began this afternoon at the closing exercises. I tried to cling to the crucifix, and it escaped me. Then I felt something like a heavy blow on my heart, and voices resounded in my head—'It is all over; you'll not be a priest! I knew that it was true.'"

Father Lippé sat by his side and said to him kindly, "And what does good Father Loupret say about it?"

"I went to tell him at once. I've just left him. It's dreadful for him."

The intensity of the torture he had just suffered at the presbytery grasped him anew, twisted his features, and brought tears to his eyes.

"Yes, I imagine this must be a hard blow for that excellent priest. It's a hard blow for everyone," murmured Father Lippé thoughtfully.

Pierre, half rising from his chair, burst out, "Perhaps I'm the victim of a passing folly? Perhaps my studies have worn me out? Keep me from going astray, say the words that are needful. Save me!"

Father Lippé's face showed no emotion. He crossed his fingers and cracked his knuckles. "Tell me; that couple who were present at the prize-giving—have you known them long? Answer me."

Pierre blushed and leaned back in his arm-chair. "No. Only since this afternoon."

"Oh!" Father Lippé jumped up as though impelled by a spring. He began to pace nervously up and down his room. Then he spoke excitedly. "I had indeed hoped that this decision was an impulsive one, brought on suddenly by those unbearable Letelliers. I know all about that—their hateful conduct toward you, toward your mother. Perhaps you are not aware that this charming Madame Letellier brought pressure to bear through her brother-in-law the Attorney-General to have you transferred to another seminary, to get you moved, for instance; to Rimouski?"

"She did that?" Pierre cried.

"Let me continue. You are well aware that you are not the Pierre of yesterday, who suffered these humiliations with a courage worthy of the first apostles. It is something altogether different and far more terrible that is happening to you, against which you can, I can, do nothing—and you know it; and in your dismay, in your moral incapacity, you come to ask me to rid you of your last scruples?"

"Father!"

"How quickly you understand! A woman stands on the horizon of your purity, and whod, now, could drive away her image? Oh! I know well enough that with another, with one of those whose pictures you see on that wall, a little cure of distance and prayer would arrange everything, would preserve the vocation. But you are Pierre Boisjoly; the upper portion of your face is that of a fierce gladiator, and your mouth has the pout of a sad angel. You are surely he whom I had feared or for whom I had hoped, I know not which. You have the soul of a Theseus, you have heard the call of the Minotaur, and nothing can prevent you from battling the monster. Your heart's righteousness will be your only thread of Ariadne, and this thread will be so long that I wonder. . . . But, Good Lord! You are of the breed of those who must find their own salvation. To have been born a Catholic, and never to pass through the Calvary of doubt—that will not be enough for you. The comfortable habit of being a Christian, without obstacles, by force of tradition, is for the mediocre, you will tell yourself. Unknowingly, you want to be the strayed sheep who will 'earn' his place in Christ's fold. Aren't you aware that the Minotaur you seek is not the true one? You see it as diverse, as formless and flowing; it is called love and ambition. But no, Pierre, the true Minotaur lies at the heart of Catholicism itself, and it gnaws at it like a huge cancer; it is called lukewarmness, mediocrity. It was, I believe, Diocletian who said of the Christians: 'When they are all converted, there will be no more of them.' Pierre, I am reminded of Charles de Foucauld. It would be so much more terrible for you if you did not embark on the adventure that now calls you, and then, quivering, miserable, embittered, waited uncomprehendingly for the next boat and boarded it with all the baggage of a spoiled vocation."

Pierre breathed quickly while he eagerly listened to the

words of the priest who read so well between the lines of his heart. It was true ; he was eager to see Fernande, to see her long hair. Once again Father Lippé opened the window wide. A gentle breeze, coming from the water, perfumed the room. Father Lippé stretched his two hands toward the beauty of the harbour and murmured : " Go, new Rastignac, Quebec is yours. You will conquer, and then, after your triumph, you will be unhappy, and you will find within yourself the real Minotaur to vanquish."

A name beat at Pierre's temples. " Fernande." He headed for the door.

" One moment ! My photo."

Pierre posed mechanically, and it seemed to him that Father Lippé was recording a face which Pierre would shortly see in the mirror for the first time. Father Lippé did not at once close the door when Pierre passed through it. He said, " It's been very disturbing for us both, hasn't it ? In a week, when we have grown accustomed to it, come back and see me, since after all you must choose another road."

Pierre acquiesced, but hardly heard, so light did he feel, so full of spring and thrust, as a result of the absolution he had just been given. Father Lippé, like Father Loupret, closed the door gently. His head in his hands, he knelt down beside his camp bed.

“ You may come in, Pierre Boisjoly ! ”

The clenched fist with which Pierre had fearfully knocked on the door opened against his thigh, and his moist hand stuck to the cloth of his suit. Here, too, they were expecting him ! A strange fear tightened the vice that held his throat. For the moment it seemed to Pierre that only the actors involved in his fate were playing this evening and that the entire universe awaited, as a spectator, the outcome of this extraordinary day. How would it all end ? The door opened wide.

“ Good evening, Monsieur Boisjoly ! ” Fernande must have taken him by the arm to get him to come in, but of that he was not sure. Only two images succeeded in piercing the veil which obscured his vision : Fernande’s smile, overflowing with questions, then a book and a head beneath a lampshade—the head of his new friend, who lay stretched on a couch. Without raising his eyes from his book, he said, “ Come, now, my fine friend ! Say something clever, make us a compliment. The young lady does nothing but talk to me about you.”

Already Pierre was sitting between Denis and Fernande, who stood by the wall straightening a reproduction of a Vlaminck and said, “ Don’t pay any attention to him. He wants to embarrass us. Let’s not humour him.”

The man chuckled a little, joyously, almost like a child. Pierre smiled. He was happy, suddenly relieved of all memory, all anguish. This little room cluttered with books, knick-knacks, reproductions of famous paintings, seemed like the vestibule to that magic world about which Father

Lippé had just spoken to him. Pierre felt himself wonderfully liberated, like the man conjured up by Descartes who succeeded in clearing his mind of all prior knowledge. Pierre felt an insane desire to say, "Ask me questions, you are my only two great friends." But he said nothing, for he could not take his eyes off Fernande's hand as it straightened the picture. Denis sat up straight on the couch, putting the book down beside him.

"My dear Pierre . . . you'll let me speak intimately? I don't invite people here whom I have to treat ceremoniously. They bother me. My dear Pierre, I—I should say 'we,' eh, Fernande? Don't say no, my child—for she is very curious about you; I'm even a bit worried, my dear Pierre. We were waiting for you impatiently."

"Let's stand by each other," Fernande said to Pierre, "and not let his teasing upset us. It's true—I admit it—I was waiting for you to come, just as impatiently as he was."

Pierre twisted his fingers, crossed and uncrossed his legs. "Could I have a glass of water?" he asked. These were the only words that occurred to him, because he was too happy, and probably because he was thirsty. He thought himself ridiculous and waited, jaws clenched, for them to burst into gales of laughter.

But, eager to be of service, Fernande jumped up. "How rude of me! I should have offered you something. It's so warm. You wouldn't prefer a glass of beer?"

Pierre seemed about to shake his head, then he glanced hesitantly at his host.

"Naturally, naturally, old man!" said Denis. "Beer doesn't damn a person, and it quenches thirst. What's more, when you are a prominent priest, you'll have to take a drink on occasion. You might as well begin right off." Then he frowned, and glanced at the book lying open on the couch. "Have you read *Le Rouge et le Noir*?"

"No."

"They told you to wait a while? I understand."

Fernande had returned, and was passing glasses. When she heard the title of the book, a trace of worry suddenly tightened her features. She said, scoldingly, "Don't be silly, please. He's had enough to do, with his studies. Let's raise a glass to his success!"

Pierre took a mouthful and could not restrain himself from making a face, which he hid behind his glass, remembering the terror his mother had tried to instil in him with regard to beer.

Denis had swallowed his in one draught. He shrugged his shoulders. "Fernande, Pierre is not a person to congratulate—you know that. See how fierce he looks. He's a little like me; he'll go far, or nowhere."

"No, I am not like you," Pierre said vehemently. He hesitated, sorry to have let the words slip. The man lowered his head and remained pensive for a moment. Fernande looked at Pierre with the wide, enchanted eyes of a lonely youngster who suddenly discovers a playmate.

"You have a very lovely voice," she said.

"Thank you very much, Mademoiselle."

Of course he had a fine voice, and fierce looks. He felt a little silly, and furtively took another swallow of beer. This strange fellow was somewhat like Father Lippé. He liked weighty, oratorical sentences. As Father Lippé would have done, Pierre began to study the eyes and mouths of these people. Fernande's eyes were wide and pure, despite the eagerness that shone in them. But her mouth, though it had clean-cut lines, seemed rather to bite than to smile. The man's forehead was low, covered with thick, short, chestnut hair. His eyelids seemed weighed down by the resigned cynicism of his eyes, but his mouth was fine and sad. Pierre thought himself to blame for the silence which had ensued. "It's nice here," he murmured.

“ Does that astonish you ? ”

Denis's face was full of mischief, and his long, sensitive hands clasped his knees. Then his features hardened and his voice turned cutting : “ You have a chipmunk's reactions. The moment a seminary student sees a man in shirt-sleeves, his hands in his pockets, his back propped against a house in some wretched street of this Latin Quarter, he says to himself, ‘ There's a thug, a good-for-nothing, wholly ignorant of literature of philosophy, a bum who lives in a hovel.’ And you're astounded ; you find here books, pictures, a pleasant atmosphere, and you decide, ‘ It's nicer than I should have thought ! ’ ”

The arrogant tone outraged Pierre. The familiar talon tightened in his heart. It was always like this ; he could never show his embarrassment except by a gesture of defiance, an insult. He spurred on his discomfort, whipped it into anger. “ That's a lie ! Such details do not interest me.”

His body taut, ready to spring forward, Pierre stared at Denis. This battle had not been foreseen, but suddenly Pierre wanted it. By what right did this cynical fellow live in this room with a young woman so gentle and innocent ? But at Pierre's exclamation of defiance, Denis's face had cleared. “ Your answer does me good,” he said.

Pierre was ashamed. Fernande must think him school-boyish. The man continued talking with a restrained fire that frightened Pierre, filling the room with a tense atmosphere in which his own feverishness increased. “ Indeed, yes ; how can there be any question between us of furniture, of amenities, of middling matters, on such a day—the day that the top man of his class, whose mother is a charwoman, put a good-for-nothing in his place, and this good-for-nothing donned his ‘ Sunday best and attended the prize-giving ? How can there be any question of such things when this young man dashes off like mad, in a taxi, without a

thank-you to anyone ! How can there be any thought of all this when we invited you, and you have come ! ”

Pierre shuddered. The amazing minutes he had lived through since afternoon were now slipping by at a faster pace, their reverberations on his destiny ever more intense. Again he asked himself, “ How will it all end ? ”

Denis slowly ran his hand through his hair until it reached the back of his neck ; then mechanically he picked up *Le Rouge et le Noir*. “ I wonder what Julien Sorel would choose as his goal in the Quebec of our day ? More surely than ever, I believe, he would choose the priesthood to satisfy his unbridled ambition. It’s the only state to-day which is invested with and continues the splendours of the Middle Ages. What’s important in the Church is that she has room for all : for saints and the ambitious, for heroes and for the mean-spirited. Of greatness she alone remains to us ; the rest—democracy, business—is all on the same level in a one-storey factory. Long live the cathedrals ! Without them the heroes of our time would be no more than millionaires. Freely given, heroism, so magnificently foolish, no longer exists. When I spoke to you this afternoon—and I really mean this—I thought of Julien Sorel. I’m happy that you should become a priest ; perhaps without ambition, probably with great faith. But if, of a sudden, freely given heroism for you were to consist in abandoning your faith, your vocation, for a woman whom you did not love, would you do it ? ”

“ I would do anything to be great ! ” With haggard eyes Pierre began to reflect on the cry which had just escaped him. Father Lippé had spoken of Theseus, of the Minotaur.

Fernande, who had listened to the conversation with anxiety, and then with growing agitation, said in a bitter voice, “ For heaven’s sake don’t ask questions of that sort. It isn’t fair. In the first place, your Julien Sorel exasperates

me. Of course he is the man of his age, the man of all the ages. He has reserved for himself all the gallantry, all the cruelty, and all the heroism, to leave women only sweetness, resignation, love, and jealousy. In your view the word 'heroine' is little more than a grammatical concession."

Denis turned toward her, his eyes wide with astonishment. "Come, come, Fernande, I didn't know you were a feminist. You sly one! Are you putting on a special show for our guest? We're thirsty, Antigone."

Pierre thought she was going to be angry, but at his worried look Fernande suddenly smiled with great gentleness and walked slowly toward the cupboard, her hips moving so rhythmically that a melody came to Pierre's lips. He was happy. Denis unhooked a guitar hanging against the wall and distractedly began to pluck the strings. "Stardust." Pierre recognized the tune. Fernande was filling his glass. "Very little, Mademoiselle!" he said.

Denis struck a string so hard that it broke. Brusquely he put the guitar back in place and began to laugh. "Pierre Boisjoly, this lady is not 'mademoiselle'; she is my mistress. We sleep together, we make love, and we are not married."

"I think you're out of your mind!" Pale, her nostrils trembling, Fernande had turned round, and her words were tremulous with apprehension and shame. Denis set his jaw; his whole body seemed tensed for an imminent attack, for he saw Pierre start up, crimson with wrath.

"I only want to see how he'll swallow such shocking talk."

It seemed to Pierre that his feet dragged in the worn rug as though he were moving through wet cement. What was he doing here? Surely the demon had drawn him into this den of iniquity. Now the walls, the pictures, the furniture whirled in a satanic dance around the evil face of this blackguard, for he *was* a blackguard. How worth while it had been to betray his vocation, to break Father

Loupret's heart, only to end here and founder under the great peal of laughter which the whole room focused upon him. The familiar grasp of pain twisted his vitals. His wild gaze suddenly fixed upon Fernande's motionless and anguished face, and she lowered her eyes. He cried, "Don't be ashamed ; I believe that you are pure !"

His anger made him aware of his muscles, and he felt himself very big and very strong. But now Denis was smiling wearily and sitting back, relaxed. "I'd like to fight you," he said. "But I'm tired of fighting my friends."

"I am not your friend ! You want to make fun of me, play with my reactions. That's not very sporting. It's true, I know nothing of these things, but even if I knew them, I do not believe that I would give them the sort of importance that serves as spice for your conversation. When the question of impurity arises for me, I think I'll discuss it only with my own conscience."

Abruptly his anger left him. It seemed to him that his words fell spent upon this man's delighted countenance.

"I repeat ; you will make a fine priest."

"I shall not be a priest !"

Pierre hurled out this sentence as a challenge. And then he had the feeling of having blasphemed. Abashed, he backed toward the door. But he stopped short. At his word, Fernande had murmured, "Oh ! . . . God !" and the man had stepped forward, his features drawn in anguish. In a hollow, appealing voice, he asked, "It happened this afternoon, didn't it ?"

Pierre nodded.

"Because of us ?"

Such deep feeling, so deep a fear vibrated in the man's voice that Pierre felt his wrath melt away. He disliked this Denis, but to see him suddenly so worried embarrassed him. He returned to his chair and sank down into it. "You had nothing to do with it."

Denis sat and clasped his head in his hands, muttering, "Damn, oh, damn!" Was it the beer, was it the kindness in the atmosphere, the warm complicity which linked him to Fernande, or the day's exhaustion, that turned Pierre's head and opened all the avenues of his heart?

"I am a poor boy," he said, "whom people have gone out of their way to humiliate for the last eight years. All of a sudden I had had enough of it, and I resolved to fight and avenge myself."

In a harsh, jerky voice he recounted to them his childhood as the son of a charwoman, his taste for knowledge, his meeting with Father Loupret, and the story of his religious vocation. He spoke to them of his mother, his brother, the humiliations Yvon Letellier had made him suffer, and the whole scene that had taken place at the Letelliers' that afternoon. When he came to his talk with Father Loupret he suddenly began to cry and could not continue. Fernande moved over to him and softly stroked his hair, saying, "Poor child!"

Denis snatched a cigarette. For a long while he watched his mistress as she caressed Pierre's head. When she sat down on the couch, he got up and began pacing to and fro.

"Pierre, I too will tell my story. My name is Denis Boucher. I know that means nothing to you. My name is Denis Boucher and I was thirty last week. Pretty old, thirty, isn't it? I was born and I lived in the working-class district of Quebec and my family was just as poor as yours. My childhood was rebellious. First of all I was revolted by the misery and ignorance of those who surrounded me. My days were passed in looking for enemies, people to whom I could say 'No.' All authority—my parish priest, the alderman from our neighbourhood, the member for our riding, the mayor, the prime minister—I despised them. At school I was like you, desperately brilliant. Everything was easy. Then at eighteen I came

to believe that women were responsible for men's sinking into mediocrity. One evening I kissed a young girl. When, after my fierce embrace, she opened her eyes, I slapped her face and left."

Instinctively Pierre looked at Fernande. Her legs tucked under her, her face very pale, she kept her eyes lowered and distractedly twisted a lock of hair around her forefinger. Denis Boucher went on talking, in a low voice, and it seemed to Pierre that the strings of the guitar responded plaintively to its vibrations.

"I was not at all religious," he said, "But on certain very fine evenings something would happen to me. I would fall on my knees near my bed and cry out, 'God, I love You, and You alone matter!' I have always been tense like a tiger ready to spring on life, and I have never sprung upon anything. Only my fists have struck, and it seemed to me that the blows I delivered emphasized my powerlessness. Then I had to leave school and earn my living. The set hours, a boss, my weekly salary on Fridays, weighed me down with shame. The war, I thought, was going to set me free. Its orgies of violence and useless sacrifice would perhaps slake my thirst. To avoid the slavery of discipline, I chose to be a war correspondent for one of this country's papers. I have seen battlefields, I have known the exaltation of sorrow over all those young victims, dead to no purpose, without pride, erased and forgotten like superfluous words. I loved them."

At this point Denis's voice hardened into such ferocity that Pierre shrank back. He thought of Father Lippe, who would derive great enjoyment from a photo of this man. Denis Boucher exclaimed, "How ugly the army is, with its braid, its colonels, its captains, and its sergeants who, to justify our reputation for national gallantry, drag frightened and ambitionless young soldiers into their exploits and to death. One evening in Italy, when one of

our brilliant officers announced to us the plans for an attack next morning, an attack against a position which to my eyes did not justify the probable slaughter of some fifty of our men, I called him a murderous numskull. He drew his revolver and ordered me to keep quiet. I jumped on him, heard an explosion, and felt my shoulder burn. By the time I lost consciousness, he was almost strangled. As soon as I was well, the military authorities sent me packing back to Canada. Naturally I lost my job on the paper. Ever since, I have lived by expedients."

There followed a short silence. Denis Boucher lit another cigarette, and when he spoke again he seemed to be talking to himself. "I don't regret having been born with this rebelliousness against society and its pettinesses. It's a splendid kind of suffering, and I would not betray it in order to take my place in the herd, under the banner of a profession, with material success as my aim. Life is too short to sacrifice your taste for the limitless to a few years of ambition and of success. As long as you are free, you keep open the avenues of flight. Security, according to Shakespeare, is man's worst enemy. When one marries, when one becomes a lawyer or a doctor, when one is labelled, all is over; one is forced to play the game, one gives in, and one dies small. I do not want to be a traitor to my hatred of the world as it is. Of course I'm a brutish person, but that is more noble than to be a coward who hides his fear under a blanket of good breeding, that invention of a world in decay."

Denis Boucher stopped his pacing and stood in front of Pierre, staring at him.

"Pierre, whatever you may say, I think that Fernande and I had something to do with your giving up your vocation. I don't like that. It may be that your decision is a dreadful mistake, yet I think that you will not change it. Just in case we have some responsibility in this mis-

fortune, I want to share in repairing the damage. And those Letelliers—they should do their share, too. For you should keep on with your studies: education is a good weapon in the fight you want to undertake. If I am a brute of a contemplative sort, you are a brute ever ready to charge head-long toward your goal, and bent on knowing exactly what direction to take. There's the big difference between us."

Denis Boucher went to the telephone and, smiling strangely, consulted the directory. "Letellier . . . there it is. Grande Allée."

He dialled the number. Dismayed, Pierre jumped up. "Don't do that !"

Denis, still smiling, patiently held the instrument. No answer. With a satisfied air he hung up, and Pierre seated himself again, breathing a sigh of relief.

"I," Denis announced, "am going out for a breath of air."

He headed for the door, and Pierre followed him.

"You aren't very polite," said Denis over his shoulder. "Keep 'Mademoiselle' company. I'm sure you won't be bored with each other."

He winked and shut the door. Fernande, who had been watching Denis anxiously, crossed to the window and glanced into the street. She saw him leaning against a telephone pole, drawing heavily on his cigarette and contemplating the sky. Returning to Pierre, she remarked solicitously, "He's like that. When he's upset, he goes out, leans against the pole, and smokes. He says it's a habit he acquired in his working-class neighbourhood."

Pierre sat down timidly on the edge of the arm-chair. Alone with Fernande, it seemed to him that he had been transported into another room, the atmosphere of which, made electric by the presence of an alluring woman, kept his adolescent excitement at fever pitch. His heart beat very quickly. Aware of these feelings, Fernande unconsciously encouraged them by slower, almost studied move-

ments. She had stopped in front of the mirror, and when she lifted her hands to arrange her hair, the gesture accentuated the curves of her body. Even her voice was infused with coquetry as she said, "Denis is quite a fellow, isn't he? At times he even frightens you."

Pierre's eyes devoured her, all of her; it was not Fernande's legs or waist or shoulders that his anguished gaze passed in review, it was that enchanted being, haloed, magnificent, inspiring, whose image had weighed upon his senses since afternoon. Was it really possible? Here he was, already alone with her; Fernande stood before him in her white dress with its pattern of brown flowers, from which her slender neck, her bare arms and legs, lightly tanned by the sun, extended with a grace that made the blood throb at Pierre's temples. All of Denis Boucher's dramatic story, which a moment before had filled the room, had fled from Pierre's mind; he could harken only to the wrath surging in him at the thought that Fernande could be Denis's mistress. She had not denied the statement. She was so lovely, and he had imagined her so pure! Those legs, those arms, that mouth, then, had yielded themselves, in nocturnal movements he dared not picture, to that man of thirty! Fernande was saying, "At times he even frightens you." He had to make an effort to construe the meaning of the word *frighten*.

"That depends. I know I'm not afraid of him."

Fernande's arms fell back along her body, and she turned around with astonishment, looking at Pierre as though she had never before seen him. She shook her head, came near and sat down in front of him, crossing her hands and speaking fervently. "You don't know him. He is of superior intelligence, he is very strong, very noble-minded. He is honest, he is violent. And he is so alone, so unhappy."

When she spoke of his high intelligence, Pierre mechani-

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cally thought of La Fontaine's *Fables*. How ridiculous! He checked himself in time. "Perhaps he is strong," he answered, "but his rebellion is negative. I shall win; I shall succeed in being magnificent!"

Pierre saw that Fernande's eyes had turned from green to grey, and it seemed to him that her mouth spat out the bruised words she had bitten off.

"How dare you speak so about one who this very moment would willingly let himself be killed for you? I've never seen him in such a state. He loved you like a brother! You should be ashamed!"

Pierre blushed so deeply that his eyes misted over. The veins of his hands swelled, and his knees trembled. Why all this violence?

"I wouldn't allow anyone to let himself be killed for me. I have not asked for help and I don't want any. I have no desire to repeat the experience I've had with Father Loupret. And this man accused you of being his mistress. He has sullied you!"

Pierre had cried out his last phrase. Now his blood ran soft and calm through his veins; the air was good, easy to breathe. All hardness disappeared from Fernande's face, yielding to a tenderness, a feeling of gratitude. She said, quite simply, "Thank you."

"He isn't worthy of you. What on earth has he done to you?"

Was this adolescent, with his strong hands, his athlete's neck, his face like an eager child's—was he in love with her? Fernande felt a sudden desire to throw her arms around him, to crush her lips against his virgin mouth, to make him grow enraptured and stammer excuses to this life he did not know and so arrogantly defied.

Then, at the candour in Pierre's eyes, she wanted to cry. "Pierre, please don't believe that I am a shameless girl like those to whom you must have compared me. Remember, I

had no Father Dupret to protect me. Denis Boucher is the first true friend I have ever met. Like you, I wanted to resist him, and I lost."

Pierre's eyes shone maliciously. Fernande noticed it and supplication slipped into her voice. "Why do you men always believe that a woman lives with a man out of wedlock for the sole purpose of satisfying sensual desires?"

Then her voice became bitter. "You are brought up to believe that once off the beaten path we are mere animals to be used for pleasure, creatures whose every playful act is stamped with lust. There is splendour everywhere, especially when the man with whom one lives is named Denis Boucher. But let that be."

For a long while she looked at him, then added in a muffled voice, "We should not have known you. You are a child with a pure heart, a child who only this morning vowed himself to the priesthood. It's Denis who upsets everything; his thirst for the infinite, his intellectual anguish, transform us, force us to put everything back into question, to concern ourselves only with the essential, and to make confessions. The moment he has you in his grasp, it's all over; despite yourself you must share his madness."

"It's true," Pierre said to himself, "I am a child." All the things which had been told him here were so foreign to him, he had made so great an effort to understand and feel them, that now he was utterly worn-out. He needed to be alone, to close his eyes and sleep. How old and burdened with experience was Fernande!

At this moment there was the scream of brakes in the street, and they hear Denis's voice—"Taxi!"

Fernande ran to the window, followed by Pierre. Denis disappeared into the car, saying, "Grande Allée." Fernande paled, and as she turned back she bumped against Pierre's chest. She laid her head upon it in her fright. "I'm afraid," she whispered.

Pierre blushed and drew back. His chin had brushed against Fernande's hair. So Denis was taking a taxi and heading for the Grande Allée! What did that matter? But Fernande was really afraid, to such a point that she had not noticed Pierre's reaction. She spoke quickly, both fists tight against her throat.

"When you told him about the thousand dollars which your mother saw in Madame Letellier's room, didn't you notice how his eyes gleamed? A satanic gleam. And that phone call he tried to make! I know him so well I could feel the line of his reasoning; I'm afraid he wants to avenge you against the Letelliers by paying for your studies with their money. I'm really worried."

Pierre glanced to the right, then to the left. This Boucher was a dangerous madman. Then he smiled his challenge. "I'm not afraid. And he'll do nothing of the sort. Don't worry."

He dashed down the stairs and, in his turn, jumped into a taxi. From the window Fernande followed him with anxious eyes.

Pierre had told the driver to make time. He did not ask himself, "How will this end?" The minutes that went by grew longer and longer, ever swelling the abscess which had grown so suddenly upon his destiny. He must hurry, catch up with Denis Boucher as quickly as he could—and yet Pierre was not thinking of that. He was reliving the moment when Fernande had stroked his hair, murmuring tendering, "Poor child." He frowned. But there was also that thirty-year-old man, that swordless d'Artagnan who was adding years to Fernande's age and soiling the image of her that Pierre had made for himself. He held her in subjection; surely he kept her prisoner. Released from this fantastic orbit she would, Pierre felt sure, forget her adventure and become once more the pure young girl he

had first seen in her. For she was malleable and weak. Her soul must undulate, like her body. Her body! Denis Boucher! An abrupt, fierce anger against this man shook Pierre. Yeb Fernante had said, "Aren't you ashamed? He's ready to let himself be killed for you at this very moment." At nineteen, to owe someone such a debt! "No!" Pierre growled. "Especially not to him."

"What, sir?" asked the driver.

"Go on, go on," muttered Pierre. "It's two blocks farther." He thought he saw a distant taxi coming to a stop near the Letelliers' residence.

Pierre jumped to the sidewalk and looked at the silent house. No lights. Cautiously he moved up the path. Denis Boucher must have walked more quickly and with more courage. Pierre turned his head. Not a pedestrian in sight. Only the stealthy glow of automobiles in the darkness. If Denis had got into the Letelliers' he had certainly not used the front door. The service entrance, then. Pierre went around the corner of the house and crossed the lawn. His heart beat heavily. The kitchen window had been raised! No further doubt was possible; Denis had gone in. With one bound Pierre lifted himself to the opening and slid through it. A strong smell of floor wax permeated the gloom. A fleeting picture of his mother, her rag under her arm, flashed through his mind. He strained his ears to detect any sound other than the dull thudding of his temples. He thought he heard something creak above him. On tiptoe he quickly climbed the stairs. Fortunately there were carpets everywhere in this house. Little by little Pierre's eyes grew used to the blackness. Cautiously he slipped his head into the room; the mirror reflected a huge shadow leaning over a bureau. It was he. Pierre moved forward. Denis Boucher had turned, ready for battle.

"Don't touch that!"

Denis's fists fell back and, with a mocking chuckle, he whispered, "You should have announced your arrival. You startled me for nothing. Now get out of here and stop meddling in the business of grown-ups."

"I don't want you to steal for me. I'm able to get my revenge by myself, and by other means."

The chuckles became louder and took on a quicker rhythm. "You'll not become a great man by virtue of noble words. This will be an all-inclusive vengeance, exciting to the imagination. We shall pay for your studies with Letellier money."

Denis had at last found the bundle of bills. With a greedy little laugh, he stretched out his hand to take them. Pierre grasped his wrist and said fiercely, "Leave that alone, I tell you, or I'll knock you cold."

"Try it, you fool!" Denis Boucher sneered.

Equal in build and strength, the two men grappled in a silent struggle. Fear of crashing to the floor restrained them, and each tried to overcome the other by the power of his hands alone. A minute passed, and the silence was broken only by the sound of their irregular breathing.

"Who's there?"

The moment they heard the wavering voice in the doorway, both let go and held their breath. "Letellier's grandmother," thought Pierre with terror. The little old lady in her nightgown was stepping hesitantly into the room and had not yet seen them. Moved by a common impulse, Pierre and Denis dashed for the door, but in their haste they tangled with the old woman, and she fell. Her head crashed into a corner of the woodwork. She did not even groan, and lay motionless. Denis, who was the first to pause in his flight, came back, stepped over the old lady's body, and closed the bureau drawer, leaving the money where it was.

"In case . . ." he murmured wretchedly.

At last the two succeeded in reaching the sidewalk. They stood facing each other for a long moment, and Pierre returned a look heavy with hatred for the look of pity in which Denis encompassed him.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Pierre with a choking sob.

"You never came here this evening," muttered Denis. "I don't know you and it is I alone who am involved. And go away and never let me see you again!"

They parted like automatons, taking opposite directions. Never had there been a lovelier evening, but all that Pierre could see was the shape of an old woman stretched on the floor. He ran to his room, threw himself fully dressed upon his bed, and fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

At nine the next morning his mother woke him. The mailman had brought Pierre a letter. . . . "My dear boy, come to see me this afternoon. I want to speak to you without fail. Yvon will be gone to visit friends in the country and my daughter, Madame Letellier, is in Montreal. I wish you much good. Yvon's grandmother."

Pierre crumpled the letter. He would never be able to speak to the old lady. She was dead, he was sure of that. Unhurriedly he dressed, and walked to the Grande Allée at a steady pace as though on his way to an appointment. When, from a distance, he saw the undertaker's van at the door of the Letellier house, he felt no shock. His forehead was cold, his mouth was dry, and his hands were moist. He turned back and bought a morning paper. "Madame Isabelle Boisseau, suddenly deceased at the home of her daughter, Madame Huguette Letellier. . . ."

He must leave this damned city. Without delay, he sought out the employment office of a lumber company.

PART II

1

It was March. The sun was boring through, gnawing away at the heavy snow in a murmur of happiness that mingled with the joyful creaking of the warmly clad balsams and the skeletal birches. Obviously the forest was rustling with pleasure at the coming of spring ; but it likewise seemed pleased at the fact that the Savard Company's lumbermen, lodged in its heart, were on strike.

In the main camp groups of bearded men were playing cards. In the kitchen the Greek, Sam Alexakis, was grumbling against the inventors of trade unionism. During the few months that the ninety-odd men on this job had been members of the Lumbermen's Union, they had been finding fault even with the best of his pies.

A few hundred feet away from the camp, sitting on a pile of freshly cut birch logs, Pierre Boisjoly was reading a thick volume, in English, the title of which—*Capital*, stamped in large white letters—looked odd as it glimmered between his long, sun-tanned fingers. Abruptly he closed the volume and pursed his lips as though to show his disillusionment. A single year had sufficed to give emphasis to the essential lines of his face : his high cheek-bones protruded, accenting the flashes of defiance that glittered in his eyes at some random thought ; the jawbones traced two long, oblique lines from chin to ears. The mouth, however, still betrayed that sad softness, underlining more than ever the contrast Father Lippé had pointed out. A year's hard physical labour had rounded the powerful muscle-structure of his large body, and this young man of twenty, casually stretched out shod in heavy boots, clad in khaki trousers

and a checked shirt, seemed much more like an athlete than a former seminarist.

His elbows on his knees, Pierre began to look over the billowing horizon toward Quebec. Suddenly his eyebrows lifted, he jumped off the pile of birch logs, and ran, sinking to his knees in the snow at each stride, toward the edge of the forest. Four queer-looking sticks, poking up into the air, had aroused his curiosity. He stopped when he reached them, and his eyes glazed over. Old Madame Boisseau's body lay before him again, evoked by the rigid legs of a deer—shot last autumn, no doubt, by some hunter who had been unable to find the carcass. Now the thawing snow had uncovered its body, intact, and the rusty trail of blood. The spring, the melting snows, once again made vivid and utterly heart-rending for Pierre that awful June day when his conscience told him he had done his share in killing an old woman. The fall and winter had gradually numbed and buried his fear, his remorse, and his despair. Even Fernande's face had faded, engulfed by his hatred for Denis Boucher and Yvon Letellier. The wreckage of his fierce desire to fight the wicked world, to reach the top of the human ladder, had been buried in the monotony and heavy tedium of a life with men who in no way interested him. Confronted with these dead, frozen legs, already softening under the sun's first rays, he found himself back again at the moment when, like a tracked beast, he had sought asylum in the lumber camps.

Bewildered, Pierre hastily scanned his surroundings, as he so often had done during the first days of his arrival, when even in the uniform of the government fire-wardens he saw a policeman on his trail. Time and again Pierre had told himself that everyone, the family, the newspapers, had believed the death accidental. But a child who is afraid in the dark repeats in vain the words of reassurance he has heard; they only fan the flame of his fear. When he first

came to the bush, Pierre had started working for a pulp-wood company, and the camp foreman, who laughed at his jumpiness (he thought him a trifle soft in the head), had set him to barking the spruce logs. But those camps were too close to civilization for Pierre's taste, and with the coming of autumn he had pushed farther into the woods and had signed up as a lumberman for the Savard Company, which was cutting white and black birch to supply the needs of the plywood mills.

At the beginning of August, Pierre had received letters from Father Lippé and Father Loupret (both of whom had obtained his address from the envelopes which brought his mother a monthly money order), begging him to return and enrol at the University. Pierre had answered neither. "Let them forget me!" he cried within himself. "Let me be erased from their memories!" Father Lippé had written him again early in September: "Remember what I told you. You have the soul of a Theseus, and you want to dive into the depths of the abyss to grasp hold of the monster's most mysterious roots. Go ahead. But don't forget to sharpen your axe, and with an eye to the use you'll put it to. Do something. Come back. Enrol in law, in medicine, in whatever you like. We'll certainly find the money needed. Meanwhile I'm for ever photographing heads that interest me. And there are more candidates than ever."

Despite his weariness after the long days, Pierre took refuge during the evenings in the cook's cabin. Alexakis had taken a fancy to him. This Greek, born on the shores of the Ægean Sea, had emigrated to Canada in his late teens, and despite a reasonably good fund of knowledge, had ended up, the Lord knows how and for what reasons, in this logging-camp kitchen. From him Pierre had learned to speak almost fluent Greek and English.

Another man in the camp was observing and studying

Pierre even more attentively than Sam. He was a Quebecker of Irish descent named Dick O'Riley. Hired during the month of October, he seemed to take very little interest in his job as lumberman. At night, in the kitchen or the mess hall, the Irishman would casually explain to his fellow-workers that the price they received for cutting a cord of wood was paltry compared to the bloated profits made by the company. Then he would open a suitcase stuffed with papers and begin reading intently, or would write a quantity of letters. One evening he approached Pierre and said to him, "Honestly, I wonder why a philosopher like you is in a place like this. Did the city get a little too hot for you?"

Pierre blanched, but the tall Irishman laughed and lent him a book on the elements of Marxism. Then it had been certain of Lenin's work which Pierre, at first confused and then amazed at the compactness of the materialist landscape, devoured. The purpose of "Big Dick," as the men called him, soon became clear. He was one of the leaders of the Lumbermen's Union, which was Communist-inspired, and the only organization ever to have pierced the armour of the forest empire a few powerful companies had built in the Quebec wilderness under the government's benevolent eye. The Catholic unions at an earlier date had tried to organize the lumbermen, but the companies, defending their feudal holdings, had prevented their organizers even from gaining access to the camps. More realistic, the officers of the communist union disguised themselves as workers, slipped into the very citadels of forestry, educated the men, distributed literature among them, organized strikes when their minds had been sufficiently prepared, and above all, sought to recruit and train persons of sufficient intelligence and character to become part of the growing apparatus of organizers. "Big Dick" had almost achieved his object; five days ago a

strike had been called following upon a demand for three dollars more pay per cord, an increase which the employer could not have granted without abandoning all hopes of profit. He still had to get Pierre's support, and thought that a reading of Marx's *Capital* would win him over.

But Pierre was far indeed from *Capital*, which he had left behind him on the birch logs. This bemused, tremulous young man was contemplating the legs of a dead deer. Pierre had a sad and sensual mouth : mental gymnastics, the pleasures of knowledge, all such things faded away the moment he felt the least emotion. The sound of crunching snow made him turn round hastily in a motion of defence.

"What you got there, Pierre?" Noiraud Labourdette, a Gaspé man who teamed with Pierre in felling trees, had light-heartedly come to join him and now grabbed the dead deer's legs to pull it from the snow.

"Leave it there!" Pierre exclaimed, pushing him brusquely away. Hastily he began shoving at the snow with his feet to hide those legs. He stared at the mound he had made, then, gazing at Noiraud's stupefaction, since that good fellow was scratching violently at one of his ears, he tried to explain. "It wasn't you who killed it. . . . Aren't you disgusted, too, by the sight of a deer's dead body, even if it is frozen?"

The glaring brilliance of the snow made Noiraud squint his small eyes, which were shining with mischief. "You city guys are beyond me. . . . But anyway, I came to tell you that Old Man Savard is on his way to the camp. He'll be here in about ten minutes. The clerk got it over the phone. I'm just waiting to hear what Big Dick's going to say. I'm fed up with this strike. Us Gaspé boys, when the wages don't suit, we just clear out! It gives me a funny feeling to say 'No' along with forty others. Somehow it makes me feel less important."

Pierre looked at Noiraud with new interest. He was a man who talked little while he worked, and he always kept the hardest jobs for himself, thus showing Pierre a silent respect. At mealtimes Noiraud ate heavily, and when, after supper, the camp violinist started to play, Noiraud religiously beat time with the rest. He said his prayers on his knees beside his bunk, fell asleep at once, and snored loudly. And without fuss, without warning, here was Noiraud asserting his individualism—"It makes me feel less important"—making it clear that he did indeed belong to the brotherhood of Gaspé lumbermen, those vagabonds of our forests who quit their jobs or change their employers as their fancy dictates, sometimes even choosing to work for less money.

Noiraud was looking fixedly at the mound, but his thoughts were elsewhere. "Would it interest you, maybe, to be partners with me? We could start a little sawmill in my village. We could cut our wood on lots the Crown has reserved for future settlers. My village is a grand place. You're educated; you could sell our wood to the Americans. After a while you would be like Old Man Savard, a real business man. Myself, of course, I'd have nothing to do with the customers, I'd just run the mill. We'd have a good thing."

Noiraud coughed and calmly began to roll himself a cigarette, just as though he were chatting about the weather, when actually he was suggesting that Pierre should help him to realize a dream he had cherished for years. Pierre's whole inner being revolted. What did he care about schemes of this sort, to which so many men gave all their lives—and life so short! One ambition alone counted in his eyes, an undefinable ambition which had first prompted him to aim at the priesthood and which, within a single day, had been transformed into a savage rage against an evil world, a world he had sworn to defeat upon its own ground.

And then the death of the old lady had shattered everything. What was happening, in Quebec? And the Letelliers, were they happy to be rid of him? Pierre looked in the direction of the city, and mechanically his foot pushed a little more snow toward the mound.

"Everything gets buried, after all," he muttered.

He accepted the package of tobacco offered him by Noiraud, who was too much absorbed in his own plans to find any meaning in words that did not relate to his mill or his village. Noiraud had a further argument for Pierre: "We have fine girls at home. If you want to, you can see them every day. They even come and watch us while we work. Here the boys have to make do with pictures of naked American girls, stuck on the wall above their bunks. Good lookers, but you don't have them."

Abruptly Pierre handed the tobacco back to Noiraud and dropped the cigarette he had began to roll. And Fernande?—Her pleading eyes, that unforgettable evening! The long hair, smoothed with a little comb!—Had she stayed with Denis Boucher who wanted to degrade her? He had said that he slept with her, and that they caressed each other long and tenderly. No longer did Pierre think of the purity in which he had promised to reinstate her.

"Excuse me, Noiraud!"

Almost at a run he headed for the camp buildings, collecting *Capital* as he passed by the birch logs. A strange eagerness stirred him, and Noiraud, motionless beside the dead deer, looked after him in perplexity.

At the camp doors, groups of men were nervously discussing the imminent arrival of Old Man Savard. Pierre went into the kitchen, where Alexakis the Greek was putting a huge cauldron of pea soup on the fire. "Big Dick" O'Riley, sitting on the edge of the sink, gnawed at some biscuits. Pierre handed him the book. "Here's your *Capital*. I'm finished with it. Thanks."

Big Dick laid aside his fistful of biscuits and stood up.
“ Well ? ”

“ The answer is No.”

The Greek turned round, his features contracted in eager and joyful curiosity. Dick, hands on hips, said,
“ You think Marx is wrong ? ”

It seemed to Pierre that he had waited all his life for this question, which opened wide an avenue for the vehemence he had felt boiling within him during the last few minutes.

“ Yes, he is right on every page. Tediously so. He seems to want to draw a circle, enclose everything within it, explain everything. But it's when you've found an answer to all the questions that others arise, more mysterious, more tormenting. That is the impenetrable horizon you deny, when for me nothing else exists. You shrink existence to its economic dimensions, you simplify everything as though by the rule of three. A man, for you, is an anonymous picket in an endless fence. You are very successful because most men think first of earning their material livings. I know that, all over the world, workers suffer and are exploited. What you offer them is a sort of Devil's bargain : we'll put an end to your economic troubles, but we'll kill your human self.”

“ Little Menshevik,” the Irishman murmured, with a scornful smile.

“ Yes, let's talk about that ! ” Pierre indignantly retorted.
“ You are a small group of pale proselytes of a revolution that broke out thirty years ago in distant Russia. And you try to transplant into this country the obsolete vocabulary of a dialectic already dead. We have a good plain word for people like you—fool.”

His face flushed with anger, the Irishman was up on his toes, but Pierre made no move. The fat little Greek had already pushed his way between them.

“ Pierre,” he said, “ when our master Socrates became

indignant his words reached no farther than his thought. You are wrong when you tell Big Dick that he is a fool. I find him very clever. Look how he has patiently engineered this whole strike. Labour problems, collective problems, are very important. Idealism is also very important. What is bad, I think, is to harness these problems to the chariot of a doctrine, as Dick does. That is very pretentious. And what I like about your individualism, Pierre, is its disinterestedness, its blindness. It pleases you to walk in the shadows, exalted, on a tightrope stretching to nowhere at all. I find that most poetic. There is an old saying in my country to the effect that those who want to explore the irrational, to explain it, are destined to die in a shipwreck. You will both die by drowning, gentlemen, if we are to believe this saying; you, Big Dick, for wanting to see the unforeseeable, and you, Pierre, for this pleasure you take in living in the imponderable—Excuse me, my stove's going out."

Big Dick and Pierre again found themselves face to face, and each thought the other looked foolish.

"There is but one beautiful thing, and that is God," said Pierre.

At once he was ashamed, without knowing why. Big Dick had calmed down, and lit a cigarette as though to make his smile even more scornful. "God?" said he, laughing a little as he exhaled a puff of smoke. "You'd have made a good seminarist. It is you people—the Greeks, then the Romans, then the Catholics—who have invented the bourgeoisie. You intoxicate yourselves with words, with literary echoes. What's more, most of your so-called great books were written during periods of bourgeois prosperity. And that's all I have to say. I don't want to talk your hollow talk. I've only one thing to tell you. If the Great Day ever dawns here, it will be the likes of you who will be the first to be swept aside."

"Hey, Big Dick!"

A lumberman burst into the kitchen. "Big Dick! Old Man Savard has just arrived in his Buick. He's gone into the bunkhouse. He looks to me as though he had a pretty good load on. He's not walking any too straight."

The Irishman stamped out his cigarette and said to Pierre, "If you feel like it, come and see how a fool of an Irish Communist handles a bourgeois."

He did not have time to go outside. Monsieur Savard, half drunk and gesturing with exaggerated good-fellowship, came bursting into the kitchen, followed by everyone in camp. He was bellowing, "Here, in the 'cookery,' fellows, where we can smell the pork and beans—that's the best place to talk things over. And I'm going to be chairman. Sam, bring me the water jug; I'm the Speaker of the House."

Embarrassed yet lusty guffaws greeted these words, spoken in a way that lumbermen could understand. A lumberjack himself in his youth, he had—thanks to his intimate knowledge of the forests and the men who work in them—succeeded in business by his own efforts; and this despite the powerful competition of well-heeled corporations that had been in the field long before him. Short, stout, with an enormous bald head, Monsieur Savard, whose grey, piercing eyes seemed literally to burst from his face, gave the impression not so much of elderly obesity as of a hearty man of sixty ready to do battle with his bank manager or to put over a profitable deal. Famous as one of the most capacious of French-Canadian drinkers—he often drank for weeks, night and day, devoting himself to his orgies with an endurance not often encountered in our times, and squandering large sums with peerless prodigality—he would suddenly stop his debauches, as though warned by an obscure instinct that he was close to the edge of madness. Then, thinned down, his nervous system all out

of kilter, he went back to work with a kind of fury, munching chocolate, leading a sober, middle-class existence, careful of his money and setting an excellent example to the community. That would last for months until some moment when, at the drop of a hat, the great campaign with the bottle would begin all over again. These were the times when, his fidgety caution transformed into amazing skill and boldness, he accomplished his most extraordinary business exploits.

Old Man Savard took his place at the end of the kitchen, near the stove, where Alexakis the Greek philosophically continued to stir the cauldron of pea soup with both hands, using a huge enamel spoon. The lumbermen had shuffled into their usual places at the trestle table, glancing now toward Savard as he stood there with his short legs encased in leather boots, now toward Big Dick, who was leaning with folded arms against the wall. Pierre had seated himself on a log in the corner and was nervously breaking tooth-picks between his fingers. There was a brief moment of silence; then Monsieur Savard plunged his hand into the large inside pocket of his overcoat and pulled out a bottle of whisky. He coughed. "Frankly, the speaker likes this better than water. Excuse me, men, it's my time for a swig."

There was a deep rumble of laughter while Savard, his head thrown back, took a long draught. Pierre noticed that his hands trembled slightly. Big Dick frowned; the old chap was clever, and he'd have to be tackled.

Monsieur Savard put the bottle on the stove. "Is there a fiddler in the gang?" he asked.

An old lumberman raised his hand, beaming.

"Bring out your violin. I'm in the mood to do a dance for you. I guess I still can."

The lumberjacks, at first tense but now relaxing, stirred with pleasure at the thought of a dance performed by the

big boss. Sons of a race which, however hard-working, has always set a high value on dancing, wine, and song, these loggers, at the crisis of a strike that had lasted for several days, forgot the important question at the first notes of the fiddle. Big Dick started forward as though to interfere, but thought better of it and patiently re-crossed his arms. The fiddler was ready. Monsieur Savard shed his overcoat.

"All set? Give me a jig."

Never had the lumbermen present seen such dancing. Stimulated by the liquor, Old Man Savard regained the extraordinary agility of his youth. He had once been the Province's finest jigger, and his mere presence at a village celebration used to make it an event to be talked about in the long winter evenings. Unconsciously the men began to accompany him by tapping their feet. The old fellow shouted and grunted to emphasize the rhythm, his big body tossing around like a buoy perched on two quaking sticks. Under the cannonade of his hob-nailed boots the whole camp shook and the enamel plates on the table rattled while, like the vapour from the Greek's pea soup, the hum of happy voices floated by up toward the roof.

Pierre cast a mocking glance toward Big Dick; and then Dick, at a single bound, stood facing Old Man Savard, from whose scarlet face the blood seemed to drain suddenly away. Monsieur Savard's magic feet were anchored to the floor. All that could be heard was the bubbling of the pea soup.

The Irishman assumed his favourite attitude, arms akimbo, feet spread wide. He stood there, swinging his weight slightly from side to side, and then said, "Okay, the show is over. Can we talk about the strike now?"

Breathless, but perfectly still, Monsieur Savard searched the Irishman's face for some time with his grey eyes; then his heavy jaw began to move.

"Very well. Your name is Dick O'Riley and you've

sneaked your way in among my lumbermen to turn their heads. You want to talk about the strike. All right ! I'll take care of you afterwards. '

He turned swiftly toward the silent men. His stubby hands, hooked by their thumbs to his broad leather belt, were shaking.

"Now, listen, men. I've been through all kinds of trouble in my life. I've ridden timber downstream ; I've damn near drowned, just like most of you. I've done everything you have. Also, and above all, I established a lumber company. Sometimes I make money, sometimes I lose it. You and I have not always agreed about rates of pay, but we've come to terms. You wanted showers and hot water in the camps and sheets on your beds ; it cost me a lot of money, but you got them. Your raise of three dollars a cord I simply can't give you, because I'd lose too much money. I'm not a philanthropist supporting forestry operations. I have you cut wood so that I can re-sell at some sort of profit. If you make this impossible, I'll go out of business—that's all. And here you are, on strike. I never thought anything like that could happen to me ; not to Willie Savard. That my lumbermen should do that to me—I couldn't believe it ! I suspected right away that someone had been giving you ideas, because your own good common sense would tell you that an increase of three dollars a cord isn't right. I couldn't make ends meet at that rate. I know your Dick O'Riley's whole story. He spent a year in Russia taking courses on how to make trouble between employers and workers in Canada. He's a Communist ! "

When they heard the words "Russia" and "Communist," the men began scowling at O'Riley ; and he, out of patience, tried to interrupt. But Savard went on quickly.

"You've had six months to talk around here, young

fellow ; let me finish. When I heard that the strike was beginning, boys, I said, ' I'll certainly have to take a trip up there.' And I couldn't do it. It was as though I was afraid to meet old friends who were stabbing me in the back. But still, I had to come. So I started to drink. I've been at it now for the best part of a week, to screw up the courage to come and see you and speak to you."

The Irishman cut him short, speaking in the dry tone he used for decisive thrusts whenever his opponent seemed to be getting the upper hand.

" I went to Russia, true enough," he said, " and I learned a lot of things there. I learned that a raft of small capitalists like you, who for years have wept crocodile tears, persuade their workers to see themselves as loyal sons of one big family. The only trouble is that father keeps everything ; and the cooked balance-sheet, showing the tax-collector a loss, enables him at the same time to say to his employees, ' You see, I'm losing money, I'm going bankrupt on account of your high wages.' You dance them a jig, you talk about old times, you shed a few tears, and the trick is turned. But you're still in business. In spite of your sacrifices, you are better off than ever ; you spend on drink hundreds of dollars that you could give your employees. Don't take the men in this camp for children. You've been pulling the wool over their eyes long enough. It's three dollars a cord or nothing. Sell your wood the best way you can—that's *your* problem. If your capitalist system can't meet the workers' just demands, well . . . let it fold up ! "

Nonplussed by this elementary Marxian dialectic packaged in common sense, Old Man Savard looked helplessly from side to side. He was wholly incapable of expressing his confused ideas on capitalism or of disentangling the true from the false in Big Dick's accusations. " Boys," he cried, " it's not true ! "

Pierre sensed his helplessness, and a reaction of pity made him get up as though in an unconscious gesture of protection. The men remained silent; Big Dick, at the words "It's not true," burst into loud laughter.

"I'll throw you out, you damned Communist!" yelled old Savard. "Get out of the camp!"

"Dodges like that don't work any more, with the unions," O'Riley managed to say through his hearty laughter. "Three dollars a cord—yes, or no?"

Scarlet, his eyes wild, Willie Savard hurled himself against the Irishman who, merely by holding out one fist, sent him staggering back against the wall.

"Big Dick!" Pale and trembling, Pierre confronted the Communist. "He's not trying to fool anyone. Don't touch him! He's old and unhappy. He's sixty, and he's willing to take on a fight. At that age, *we* won't be fighting any more."

O'Riley laughed all the harder. He bent double, and clasped his knees. "Sam," he cried, "bring a big pitcher of milk for poor little Pierre; he's going to cry."

No one else was laughing. Pierre saw the tense bodies of the men as through a cloud. "Say that again!" he challenged.

"Two more pitchers of milk for little Pierre, who's just about sobbing. Quick, Sam! . . ."

O'Riley had no time to finish his sentence. Pierre was making for him. But the Irishman sidestepped, leaving one long leg extended. Pierre tripped and dived headlong under a bench, and O'Riley, still laughing, this time to the accompaniment of the lumbermen's chuckles, grabbed him by the ankle and began pulling him toward the stove. Pierre did not feel the sting of the splinters as they pricked his hands. His eyes, wide with anger, were fixed on his long, tanned fingers as they slid along, impotently clawing at the floor. His hips, then his head, dragged over a loose

plank, and now its edge was beneath his arms ; in another moment he was able to grasp it with one hand. Contracting all his muscles, he hung on, and then with a shout released himself like an uncoiling spring. O'Riley staggered back against the stove. Pierre jumped up and leapt at him. As soon as his fist had made contact with the Irishman's chin, he closed his eyes and let his arm fell to his side, for he knew that the fight was over. He had struck that jaw with the full force of his anger, and at the instant of the blow a strange, strong feeling of pleasure had run up his arm and into his heart. Not a sound. He opened his eyes. No one was lifting Big Dick from where he lay stretched beside the stove, on which Sam was still stirring the soup. Monsieur Savard was staring in amazement at Pierre, and the lumberjacks seems frozen to their seats. A memory of some film he had seen prompted Pierre to stoop over Big Dick's body, pick it up, kick open the door, and toss the Irishman on to a snow-bank. Quietly he re-entered, carefully closing the door behind him. Still silence. He seemed to have become absolute master of the situation, and he alone had the right to the next word, the next move. He trembled like some school-child who suddenly finds himself the centre of all his classmates' attention. Like that child, too, he would have preferred to be almost anywhere else at the moment, perhaps quietly listening to Big Dick, who must after all know a great many things, who had no use for him, but with whom he was no longer angry. His furtive glance was caught by Noiraud Labourdette's eyes, gazing at him in admiration.

Pierre turned pale. His heart missed a beat. The deer's legs ! Madame Boisseau, who had fallen in the same way, never to rise again ! A sob of terror pulled his upper lip into a squarish grimace, above which his nostrils quivered, white with fear. " I've killed him ! " he mumbled. He dashed outside once more, lifted the Irishman's head,

and rubbed his face with snow. A trickle of blood ran from the corner of the mouth. Then the eyes flickered. The eyes were shadowy blue, clearing suddenly as they caught sight of Pierre.

The young man caught hold of the Irishman's arms, and in his joy he shook him violently. "Are you feeling better?" he asked eagerly.

O'Riley freed himself roughly, and looked toward the camp; then his head dropped, and he sighed. "They didn't try to defend me, did they?"

"No."

"Then it's a flop."

Rubbing his chin, he got up; he paid no attention to Pierre, and the young man felt slighted. Had it perhaps been through jealousy of Big Dick's calm assurance that he had wanted to prevent him from succeeding? In an almost pleading tone, of which he was ashamed, he said, "Big Dick, you ought not to have humiliated me. All my life I've been slapped down. You are the first one I ever hit back at."

"Damn fool!" muttered the Irishman. For some moments he looked Pierre up and down, almost contemptuously. "You can keep your bourgeois sentimentality for yourself, all nice and cosy. For us of the Party, humiliation is nothing. Cracks on the jaw, defeats, they're nothing. Where we lose to-day we'll win to-morrow. We can't miss. We know where we're going. But you—you're pretty sure to miss; you're all mixed up and you lose your temper like a little street-walker. There's at least one lesson to be learned from this farce: we have to push aside the devotees of outmoded individualism, like you, whenever they cross our path. I should have taken care of you at the beginning. But I'm an Irishman; I'm too prone to want to convert people. I'll have to discipline myself. And I've also learned this truth, that we can always operate better against

corporations where the boss is a board of directors—those octopuses that strangle the proletariat. It's hard to work inside these little outfits where the men have direct contact with a single boss. But I'm relying on your capitalist system. With the help of the banks, the day will come when the little bosses also will be strangled by the octopuses.⁰ Oh, by the way ! To free you of any illusion that your fist made a difference, I'll tell you I was losing anyway. The old man had already sucked them in with his dancing and his tears."

The Irishman buttoned up his checked jacket and headed slowly for the bunk-house, adding to Pierre over his shoulder, "Perhaps we'll meet again. Think about Marx. He is like your God the Father—the older he grows, the stronger he gets. Only Marx is more realistic !"

Pierre shivered ; he felt the cold now. O'Riley was very strong, and he knew where he was going. Pierre, dismayed for a moment at the thought that he was in process of becoming a sort of Denis Boucher, a wordy swashbuckler tilting against windmills, went back into the camp and walked straight toward Willie Savard, who presumably had just cracked a joke, since all the lumbermen were in gales of laughter and his own head, tilted back, seemed about to engulf the bottle of spirits that was stuck into his mouth.

Monsieur Savard withdrew the bottle and bowed to Pierre respectfully. "How the strike getting on, out there ?" he asked.

"Big Dick has left and won't be back."

Instead of expressing his delight, Willie Savard looked at Pierre apprehensively, for the young man's tone had been sharp, and his eyes were strangely bright.

"Now we must settle the strike," said Pierre. He turned toward the men. "Will a dollar-and-a-half increase be all right with you ?" he asked them.

Cries of "Yes!" came from all sides. Old Man Savard moved toward Pierre, eyeing him curiously, but Pierre felt he had the upper hand.

"And is a dollar and a half all right with you?"

"Done! It's certainly worth that, to see a Communist knocked out," cried the boss, holding up his bottle at arm's length.

Then the celebrations began. Standing on the benches, the yelling lumbermen clashed their enamel plates like cymbals. The Greek smiled enigmatically, and continued to stir his spoon in the vast cauldron of soup. Willie Savard signalled to the fiddler and resumed his wild jig, rhythmically accompanied by a hubbub of stamping feet, rattling dishes, and cries, through which the harsh tone of the fiddle zig-zagged its way. But Pierre felt weary and ashamed. An accusing phrase pounded through his head in time with the pounding of the men's boots on the floor: "Price-cutter, price-cutter, price-cutter. . . ."

The party lasted well into the evening. Monsieur Savard, more and more drunk, could hardly stand on his feet. Not once had he said a word to Pierre, who remained seated in a corner, watching the scene with impatience and disgust. Pierre had not left the kitchen, despite his desire to get away from the crowd, for fear of running into Big Dick, who probably would say nothing and pass him by with a sneer. "Strike-breaker, tool of the exploiters," the Irishman must be saying contemptuously to himself. At the mere thought of this, Pierre's whole being rebelled, and he wanted to cry, "It's not true!" He had simply acted in accordance with his desire to be splendid, to be noble, to defend the loser even if the loser disgusted him. Everything O'Riley said and did, even his rages, had a purpose, thought Pierre. The images in his brain jostled each other, stirred up by indignation. Thus he compared Big Dick

to an engineer who runs his life as though it were a locomotive headed for some station indicated in a time-table. This mechanization of existence contracted a horizon which Pierre felt and wished to be limitless. The big thing, he tried to tell himself, is to obey without hesitation all the generous impulses of one's soul, and that absolutely without calculation. He had felt Monsieur Savard to be unhappy and defenceless against O'Riley, and had defended him. He had also won an increase of a dollar and a half a cord. It was, above all, the recollection of this act that tortured him with shame while Monsieur went on jiggling and yelling. The inner confusion against which he was struggling did not allow him to decide which of the two remorsees outweighed the other—that of having stolen the strike from the Irishman, or that of having won a concession for his damnable Marxian materialism.

Old Man Savard's last bottle was empty. He hoisted his belt and staggered into his coat; then he wove his way over to Pierre. "Do you know how to drive?" he asked.

Pierre did not answer. Of course he knew; he drove trucks on the job.

"I've taken a fancy to you. Go get your stuff. You're going to drive me back to Quebec."

"I've taken no fancy whatever to you," said Pierre arrogantly, in the unconscious hope that his answer would come to the Irishman's ears.

Monsieur Savard closed his eyes, and bent his big head down patiently to Pierre, who was still hunched up in his corner. He spoke in the very soft voice of a drunken man.

"Perhaps you are right. But that doesn't prevent your doing me a favour. I'm sick—sick from liquor, if you like, but I am sick. And I have to get back to Quebec this evening. Will you drive me back?"

"Yes! I'll be ready in five minutes."

That "Yes" was the explosion of sudden visions of the

Quebec Seminary, of the dear tortuous streets, of the battle without mercy he had sworn to fight with a decadent world. It was also Fernande's face that he saw, and Father Loupret's, and Father Lippé's, and the cemetery where Madame Boisseau lay buried. Above all, he saw the worn face of his mother, and his heart raced at the mere thought of meeting her again. This return to Quebec, so greatly dreaded, he suddenly desired with all his heart.

When he took his place at the wheel of the Buick, two men watched him start the car. One was Noiraud Labourdette, who said nothing, but in whose mournful eyes a long-cherished dream was fading. Pierre released the brake and waved at him. "See you soon," he called.

"Ah, you'll never be back," muttered the lumberjack, shaking his head.

Alexakis the Greek, draped from head to foot in a long, yellow overcoat which was a standing joke with the men, said: "Maybe I'll see you again, if you don't come back here. I'm getting the urge to move. There are restaurants in Quebec, aren't there?"

"Let's get going," said William Savard curtly, his enormous head sunk down into a neck that looked as though it were upholstered. "I'm sick of this place."

Through the moonless night, past the greyish birches, the green Buick slipped noiselessly, almost hypocritically, along the forest roads flanked with half-melted ridges of snow. At every turn the powerful headlights outraged the mysteries of the mountain slopes. Then the highway came into sight.

2

As soon as Pierre felt the easy roll of the tires on the pavement, which had been swept clean by the March winds, his body fell into a state of semi-relaxation. Was not this asphalt the carpet which Quebec was at last offering for his triumphal entry? With a quick glance, he checked the indicators on the dashboard. Seventy miles an hour. Big Dick and his strike were now a long way behind. And this old man at his side, who had not said a word, and to whom Pierre had not given so much as a look—his asthmatic breathing was making the whole interior of the car stink of alcohol, and his head must be swinging from side to side on its pedestal of blubber! Pierre risked an oblique glance.

Monsieur Savard, motionless, his eyes wide open, was staring at the road with an expression of sadness accentuated by the humorous twist of his mouth. He sensed rather than saw Pierre's movement. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty."

"I must have been drunk."

"Why?"

"Because quite obviously you're 'only' twenty. You haven't driven much. You go too fast."

Pierre, without accounting to himself for his gesture of bravado, accelerated. Monsieur Savard dug out his package of cigarettes and offered him one. Pierre declined; then he frowned. No longer was Old Man Savard the boss masquerading as a lumberjack to put himself on a level with his workers. He was treating Pierre now as though he were a child to be cajoled; and Pierre had increased his speed because, underneath his defiance, he had to build

defences against the heavy experience of life that suddenly emanated from this old man. Pierre did not want to let himself be crushed by it ; he struggled against the feeling of timid submissiveness that sought to take possession of his heart.

" Monsieur Savard," he said, " I am not Big Dick. And I'm driving too fast to be able to argue. Answer my question. You said, ' I must have been drunk,' and I asked you why."

Willie Savard's hearty laugh broke out, and then as suddenly stopped. " I've three thousand cords left to cut. At a dollar and a half, that makes four thousand five hundred dollars. This evening you cost me forty-five hundred dollars."

" Oh ! " Pierre cheerfully exclaimed. " You're a strange one. I thought I'd saved you that amount."

" I think you told me your age just now ? "

" Twenty."

" You've a great future ahead of you. Would you like to become my secretary at a hundred dollars a week ? "

" No ! "

Pierre was deeply happy. The magnificent car swallowed the village along the highway at a speed bordering on magic. Quebec's outstretched arms would soon open wide, and he would throw himself into them with joy. And there were people besides old Savard to whom he was going to say " No ! " What a lovely evening it was !

Monsieur Savard coughed, and said, " If you hadn't stuck your nose into things, I should have settled that strike without any increase at all. I know my lumberjacks. The Irishman's weighty arguments were beginning to bore them. My little act of being angry was going well. You spoiled everything. After that I'd have sung a couple of songs with good rousing choruses, and we'd all have been friends again. I guess I really have an expensive chauffeur."

And again the old fellow began to laugh. Pierre's pleasure oozed away. He had conquered no one ; neither Big Dick, nor Old Man Savard, for evidently Savard had merely been kind in letting it appear that his fight with O'Riley had saved the day.

"What sort of man are you when you've not drunk?"

Old Man Savard did not reply. He was looking out into the night. Then he said, "Stop at the hotel with the red roof, to the right. I'm thirsty."

The two men entered the hotel bar. They were the only ones there, seated beside a pillar and surrounded by red tables whose chrome legs shone with boredom, reflecting the sad glow of the neon lights.

"A double John Dewar," Monsieur Savard told the waiter, who seemed to know him and had hurried over with obsequious haste. "And for the other gentleman, a glass of milk."

The waiter guffawed. Pierre interrupted him curtly. "You were told to bring a glass of milk. Do you understand?"

Monsieur Savard did not immediately pick up his drink. He solemnly watched the golden glow of the whisky, which jovially challenged the bluish whiteness of Pierre's milk. Pierre repressed a yawn, and after a long silence Monsieur Savard smiled.

"I said yes to the dollar and a half, a while back, for the same reason that led me, and in all sincerity, to order milk for you, when my only thought was for a John Dewar."

"For what reason?"

"Because I am drunk." Then he grasped his enormous head in his stubby hands and began vacuously studying his glass.

"I drink," he said, "to get even with all I do when I am Monsieur Savard, the prominent Monsieur Savard. If I'd been sober I'd have told you off, without even trying to

understand you. It's funny ; when I am drunk, I think of all sorts of things, I ask myself questions, I feel as though I were waking from a long sleep. Believe it or not, at such times I think pretty seriously about God ; and thinking seriously about God seems to egg me on to overdo things. Yes, I like you. A while back, at the camp, you said something that nearly set me back on my heels. 'He's old and unhappy,' you said. You know what your glass of milk makes me think ? We need women to end up the night with."

Pierre, who had been listening to the business man's self-analysis with lively curiosity, suddenly felt a qualm. He heartily wished that Monsieur Savard would fall asleep so that he could drive him home without delay, for he felt that, awake, the old fellow would hold him prisoner and take him wherever he wished. Was it because of the forty-five hundred dollars Monsieur Savard had lost through him, or was it to avoid seeming a coward in the face of mysterious adventures, that Pierre refrained from answering and merely swallowed his milk in one long draught ?

"You've had an education," said the old man. "I'm sure of it. Will you tell me what the hell you were doing in my lumber camps ?"

In Pierre's disturbed mind, the picture of the dead deer's legs again began to take form. Anxiously he looked at Monsieur Savard, and then slowly explained.

"I finished my classical course last year, at the Minor Seminary. And all of a sudden I felt nauseated by life in Quebec. I left. And then . . . what good does it do, to explain all this ? . . . my mother's a widow. I am poor. My parish priest was paying for my education."

Pierre heard himself, and did not recognize himself. He was next door to lying, and he was talking with the same casual intonation that Old Man Savard had used a short

time before, when he broke into Pierre's joyful thoughts of Quebec's open arms.

"I like that," said the old fellow in the midst of a hiccup.

"Do you want to be my secretary?"

"No."

Pierre suddenly felt relieved. And the milk was also quieting his nerves.

"You think logically. You say No for the same reason that makes you drink milk under my very nose. You'd have fun, though, as Willie's secretary. You'd have a model boss to deal with. After I get to the office at nine, I think of two things all day long: my next balance sheet, and the hour the banks close. They always close at three, and they never get drunk. At five my employees leave, and say good night over their shoulders, a little embarrassed. They don't know it, but they're all ashamed of leaving at a set hour every evening. And to get even for feeling that way, they inwardly write me off as an old stinker. When they have all left, I go home. I live alone there with my wife. My son and my daughter are married. It's my wife who opens the door for me. She always looks severe when I arrive, and I see her nostrils quivering. She's sniffing my breath. No drink? She heaves a little sigh of contentment which means, 'Thanks, dear Mother of God, it won't happen to-day.' We have supper, we play dominoes, I read, and—a sacred ceremony before going to bed—I scrupulously wind the seven clocks in the house."

At this point Monsieur Savard let out such a howl that Pierre jumped and the glasses rang. "It's more than I can stand!" he wailed.

The waiter hurried over and brought him another drink. A little saliva shone at the corners of his mouth, and he raised toward Pierre besotted and imploring eyes. "If I were always drunk, would you be my secretary?"

Pierre had not the courage to answer, and Monsieur

Savard shook his head. Then his anger returned. "So when I'm drunk, I smash everything in the house, I bash in the clocks, I look around for my wife to beat her up, to break that nose which is for ever sniffing at me. My children; my brothers-in-law, would like to convene a family council to request a judge to have me locked up, alleging that I'm squandering their fortune, that I'm wrecking my business, that I'm a lunatic at large. Do you know something? My wife has always refused. Dear little girl, how I love her! What's more, Willie Savard will know how to hide when that time comes. Oh! Oh! Oh!"

He rose and went over to the barman, who took him into another room where there was a showcase containing various pieces of handicraft—slippers, scarfs, sculpture. Monsieur Savard bought a statue of the Blessed Virgin and returned to the table, where he sat down opposite Pierre and laid the box carefully on his knees. Then he got up again, as though on a sudden inspiration, and, with the box under his arm, went to the telephone. Pierre heard him reserve a room in a Quebec hotel. He made a few other calls too, and Pierre thought he heard him speaking to women whom he addressed quietly by their first names—Alice, Simone, Yvonne.

Pierre's qualms began to turn into fright.

Midnight. Pierre, at the wheel of the Buick, had reached the outskirts of Quebec. The hour at which he usually went to sleep had passed, and he felt his body recovering its suppleness, his brain alight with a nervous lucidity. At the sight of the Chateau Frontenac's towers piercing the heavens his heart beat faster. To see his beloved city once more, at night, after nearly a year's absence, wiped from his mind all recent happenings; he was hardly aware even of his strange and disturbing companion, from whom he

was separated only by the statue. Monsieur Savard seemed to doze, but from time to time would ask weird questions. They had to stop at a grade crossing, and the business man suddenly straightened up. "Simone," he said, "are we pulling into Chicago?"

Pierre made a face, and started the car nervously. He had fully made up his mind to leave the old fellow at the door of the small hotel where he had been told to go, and then never again to lay eyes upon him.

"Oh, it's you, my secretary!" hiccuped Monsieur Savard. "Tell me, what time is it?"

"Midnight."

"My guests won't arrive before one. Let me off for a minute at home. I have business there."

Pierre, annoyed at Savard's peremptory tone and upset by this unexpected turn of events, swung the car viciously toward its new objective. When would he ever get rid of the man? But here was Savard's street at last, and the substantial house where he lived. Pierre would soon be free of this whole nightmare.

"No lights on," the old man said. "My wife's asleep; do you hear the clocks ticking? There are seven of them. Be careful, don't jam on the brakes, or you'll wake her up. Wait for me—I'll be back right away."

Monsieur Savard stepped out of the car, the statue under his arm; but he thought better of that, put the parcel back on the seat, and asked Pierre not to touch it.

Pierre, followed the old man with his eyes, saw him stumble up the few steps to the door, hesitate, then press the bell with the fearful finger of an inmate getting back to a home for the aged after the doors are locked. On the second floor a light went on, and its glow, reinforcing that of the street lamp, seemed to brighten the interior of the car. Pierre's glance settled on the box containing the statue of the Blessed Virgin, and he hastily pulled away

from it in embarrassment. He could vividly imagine the head and its divine smile emerging from the folds of the carved wood. This vision gave birth to another, wholly overwhelming, that of a father bringing to the graveyard his still-born child, whose body lay in a rough box on the front seat of a taxi.

With a movement of terror, which he tried to control, Pierre shoved the door open. This Blessed Virgin to whom he had said no prayer since Madame Boisseau's death, this Virgin to whom he had until then murmured loving words—"Hail, Mary"—every evening of his young life, was she not the image of the dead faith he was bringing to burial? For a year he had not allowed a single word to go up from his heart toward God; each time a twinge of despair had prompted him to join his hands and whisper, "Lord, I love You," in the silence of the forest, he had held himself back, refusing to offer God a prayer that, to his intransigent soul, did not seem absolute and splendid. How, he often thought, could his prayers be acceptable, soiled as they would be at their source by the forsaking of his vocation and by the lustful vision of Fernande which, in his nightmares, superimposed itself upon that of the dead old woman?

Pierre left the car; it would be better to run away at once from the statue and from the drunken old man. Crouching behind the automobile, he glanced toward Willie Savard before starting off down the side street. The front door was opening. And now a tall, thin woman, her hands crossed over her nightgown, her grey hair pulled and twisted into preposterous curlers, was outlined in the doorway beyond Old Man Savard, whose head was stretched toward her imploringly. But suddenly the old fellow straightened up and jumped at the woman, his fists raised. Pierre heard him shout, "Yes, I smell!"

The two of them disappeared into the house, Madame

Savard retreating under the blows and piteously yet not loudly protesting. From the remote depths of his childhood, a picture thrust its way back into Pierre's consciousness. A bearded man, his father, striking his mother, trying to extract the money she had toiled to earn by cleaning the homes of the rich; and Pierre, a small boy, clutching at this violent man's towering leg. Should he deal with Monsieur Savard as he had dealt with Big Dick? Leaning forward as he ran, his fists clenched, he seemed to have wings. He must have cleared the steps without touching them, for already he was in the house, standing motionless at the threshold of the parlour, pale, feet apart, arms up, ready to strike. Madame Savard was huddled in the corner of an arm-chair; her nose was bleeding, but her hands were doing nothing about it. They were clasped tight around her bony knees. Only a restrained murmur of grief escaped her. On the wall above her chair Pierre saw a family photograph—Monsieur and Madame Savard, with two children. They looked happy.

A hubbub of crashing furniture, savage cries, and shattering glass broke the silence. Pierre went into the next room and saw a huge grandfather clock lying on the carpet, its front open, its pendulum twisted, and shards of glass strewn all around. Then he became aware that Monsieur Savard, sobbing, his eyes bulging from their sockets and filled with tears, was sitting at the dining-room table, his chin on his folded arms. Whom was Pierre to defend? Whom should he attack? What could he do, except drop his hands to his sides and purse his lips in deepest pity?

"Pierre, take me away from here quick!" sobbed the old man. He tried to get up but fell back into his chair. "Pierre, help me."

Pierre lifted him with a kind of protective tenderness. He would have liked to help Madame Savard as well. But what can you say to console an unknown woman

accustomed to her sorrow. At least he could hold Monsieur Savard under the arm and help him walk. The two of them passed in front of the old lady and Pierre, breathing hard, his forehead covered with sweat, hoped he could avoid her faded, tearless eyes.

"You coward," she moaned. "You always find some good-for-nothing to help you."

Suddenly Pierre wanted to cry, to put his head on Madame Savard's knees and tell her that he loved her. But the fresh outside air, flooding in through the open door, offered an escape from the nightmare, and he dragged Monsieur Savard to the street with shameful haste.

He should have fled when he had the chance, and left these two unhappy people to their tragedy. Once more he was driving the Buick, with the statue between him and Monsieur Savard.

"Now to the hotel, if you please." The drunken man had spoken very gently. He was staring at the pavement, and two tears, caught in the light of the street lamps, shone on his flushed cheeks like two drying drops of wine. Pierre saw again the blood dropping from Madame Savard's nose, and his fury rose against this ageing wife-beater who had won him with a few sobs as he had won the lumbermen with his jigs. He had taken Monsieur Savard by the arm, and the old lady had called him a good-for-nothing although he had gone in only to protect her. He damned his generous feelings which, when translated into action, always turned against him. He had wanted to prevent Denis Boucher from robbing the Letelliers, and the grandmother had died in consequence; he had defended Monsieur Savard at the camp, only to become a traitor in Big Dick's eyes.

"Here we part!" Pierre said to the old man at the hotel door, tossing the keys into his lap. "I'm going home."

Home! He almost wanted to smile. How good it was

to say, after so many months. He would wake his mother, kiss her, and say to her, "Mama, I'm back for good." But Monsieur Savard straightened up and, his eyes protruding with terror, clung to Pierre's coat.

"Don't leave me! You can't leave me alone. I might kill myself. You yourself said, 'He's old and he's unhappy.' Don't go!"

Pierre weakened; with a feeling of shame he realized that his resolution was gone. The weight of this elderly drunkard's pain was more than he could withstand; it stamped itself upon him, overcoming his will. If he could use his strength only against a youthfulness equal to his own, how could he ever successfully combat the world of Quebec so much of whose power lay in the hands of old men?

"I owe you nothing," he protested.

Monsieur Savard seized upon this hesitation. "This evening's four thousand five hundred dollars—I gave the men that increase to please you. I could have said No, and everything would have worked itself out anyway. Pierre, take care of me until to-morrow."

The conversation was becoming unbearable. "Very well," said Pierre. "but I don't want to be mixed up in any business with these women who are coming to the hotel."

Carefully Old Man Savard tucked the statue under his arm.

The revelry was taking place in Monsieur Savard's room, for Pierre had insisted on a room of his own. There was a door between them, however, and Pierre had tried in vain to find a key for it. Lying fully clad on his iron bed, he had been tossing from side to side for an hour, incapable of sleep. The ceiling and walls were covered with a dirty yellow paper, marred by numerous cracks, the very sight of which intensified the heaviness that pressed down upon his eyes. Women's cries, the shattering of tumblers hurled

against the wall, the sound of running feet, and Monsieur Savard's curses were mingled in an uproar that defied description, keeping Pierre awake and making his imagination work at fever-pitch.

With all his heart he longed for a door that would let him escape without being seen; he could see it taking shape on the blank wall, and at that very instant one of those women whose lewd shouts he heard would be breaking into the room, almost naked, and extending her golden arms toward him, her face lit up by alcohol and desire. And then he imagined himself saying softly, "Go away or I'll strangle you!" Must he also list loose women with old men in the group of people he could not fight? Why not sleep, like the young and powerful but exhausted animal he was? Why conjure up all these silly visions? There was only one door—the door leading to Monsieur Savard's room—and none of these women had so much as opened it a crack. Anyway, if he had really wanted to escape, he had only to jump out of the window on to a long shed adjoining the wall of the hôtel; he could hear cats scampering on it.

As soon as they arrived at the hotel, the two men had taken their separate rooms, Monsieur Savard eagerly opening one of the two bottles of whisky the proprietor had sold him at a fancy price, and Pierre throwing himself upon his bed after taking off only his coat and shirt. The women (there seemed to him to be three of them) arrived a little later. His fists up in an attitude of defence, Pierre had waited in the expectation that they would open his door. They had done nothing of the sort. Then came three furtive knocks, and Old Man Savard had entered on tiptoe, holding tendering under his arm the statue in its box, which he laid on the bureau near Pierre's bed.

"Don't bother about us, Pierre," he had said quietly, as though to a child being tucked away for the night.

"We won't bother you. We'll drink, I'll beat them up a little, perhaps a lot, and then I'll make them run around the room like mares, whacking them with my big leather belt. I've always dreamed of being a cowboy, You know—the American influence. It'll cost me a hundred dollars or so. It's a bit sickening, but I have to do it. Every time I hit my wife it's like that. I have to go the whole way. Forgive me."

Then he had left, still on tiptoe, gently closing the door behind him. And now an hour had gone by.

Terrible things must have happened in the room next door, to judge by the chorus of lewd outcries emanating from it, and the race under the lashing of the belt must have taken place several times, for by now Pierre's forehead was beaded with perspiration. Perhaps for the hundredth time his burning eyes happened to light upon the statue, and for the hundredth time they at once turned toward the door, which finally burst open wide to admit three furies, their hair streaming behind them.

"There he is," they howled. "Let's eat him up quick!"

In his agitation the only thing that Pierre noted distinctly was a long varicose vein on one of those heavy, fat thighs. Why had he not thrown himself on the other side of the bed and used it as a shield to ward off these poor deranged beings, with their dyed curls, their crazed eyes, their large, withered mouths, who would leave in his memory only the picture of a vague trio of pitiful human bodies, hides wrinkled with impurity, emptied even of sin and filled with disgust and sadness? Why did he remain there, stretched on his back and doing nothing to defend himself except to put up his long arms to protect his face? This scene lasted only for an instant. In their efforts to get at his body, his lips, they gasped for breath, and from their throats came hoarse cries of mingled vengeance and desire.

" Bitches ! So you've done it, eh ! "

Monsieur Savard, his eyes bloodshot, his big face gathered into a ferocious scowl, hurled himself into the room, grasped a chair, and began hitting the three women on their backs, making them straighten up with pain. Bellowing, Monsieur Savard continued to hit them as hard as he could. The prostitutes screamed, tried to ward off the blows, retreated against the wall, and on their faces the sweat of desire seemed to freeze into the dull tones of terror. Now they uttered little cries of fear and supplication. Pierre jumped from the bed and tore the chair from the hands of the intoxicated man, then set it back on its feet on the exact spot from which it had been lifted. The women continued to hold up their forearms in a gesture of self-defence, and Old Man Savard, whose fat, hairy trunk was trembling, stood still, gazing at them stupidly. Pierre noticed another detail with great distinctness—Willie Savard's braces hanging down over his hips.

Pierre turned his back on them and looked out of the window, leaning on his elbows. The city slept ; far away the Laurentians were lovely under their snow, and he wanted to cry. To cry for these women and for Monsieur Savard, all sunk so deep in ugliness.

He was vaguely aware of the old man ordering them to get dressed, slipping them money, and shouting at them to get out. Then a great sweetness and a great peace took possession of Pierre's mind. Automatically he laced his fingers together and, with his eyes fixed on the roof of the Seminary, recited tenderly, " Lord, I love You, I give You my heart. Hail Mary, full of grace. . . . "

The breaking of a bottle hurled against the floor, followed by the quieter sound of hasty movements, brought Pierre out of his meditation. Monsieur Savard, fully clothed, timidly entered the room, and his big features now seemed

sunken, invested with age, weariness, and pain. In a very low voice, and hesitantly, he said, "It wasn't my fault. I certainly told them not to. But it's all over. I've broken the last bottle. Now come see me phone."

Curiously Pierre watched the old fellow, who consulted his wrist-watch and frowned as he realized that it was nearly three o'clock in the morning, yet sat down near the telephone all the same, muttering, "Mother Cecilia makes her rounds at this hour ; I'll have to take a chance."

"Can Mother Cecilia come to the telephone ?"

He smiled radiantly. She could come, she would come. He had forgotten that Pierre existed. Feverishly, as though Mother Cecilia had been right there in the room, he dusted off his coat with his free hand, adjusted his tie, arched his back, and tried to make his face take on a sober and respectful expression. Then he jumped, and his head literally darted toward the voice that came over the wire. Pierre was amazed at the calm tone Monsieur Savard at once assumed and at the childish anxiety written so plain on his features. "It's Willie Savard, Mother. You're well ? You ought to take a rest. I should too ? You know very well that I'm an old fool. Would you have a room for me at the sanatorium ? Yes, right away. Oh ! I swear to you that I won't be difficult. It's exhaustion rather than anything else. You don't believe me ? You know I'm not a liar. You're short a nurse to-night ? I've a very respectable young man with me who'll take care of me."

He uttered a cry of triumph : "I can come ! Thank you, my Sister. You know, I was thinking of you this evening. I'm bringing you a little present. See you shortly."

He hung up with boyish haste and then turned slowly toward Pierre. Pierre hadn't a thought left in his head. The old fellow would drag him off again, apparently to a hospital, and he would have to trail along as a nurse.

His eyes lowered, Monsieur Savard was speaking with something like shame in his voice. "It's a clinic for drunkards, drug addicts, and all sorts of deranged people. Mother Cecilia, a saint, is the Superior. She doesn't want to take me to-night unless some reliable person will spend the next twelve hours with me to watch me as though I were violently insane. When I stop drinking abruptly, like this, the first reactions are awful. I see visions, I scream, I want to escape, I want to beat up everyone. Will you come? Afterwards you can leave and never lay eyes on me again, if that's what you want. I'll pay you well."

"Above all, not that!" Pierre grumbled between his teeth, giving him a look of hatred.

Why the hatred? Perhaps because the old man was making him stay awake, making him play the rôle of a good Samaritan for drunkards when he was so dreadfully sleepy. In silence Monsieur Savard pressed his arm, then marched over to the bureau where he had put the box containing the statue. A few moments later they were on their way to the sanatorium.

All the time he was driving, Pierre had vainly tried to collect his thoughts, to get his bearings, to define exactly the situation in which he found himself, to explain his own attitude. One circumstance baffled him: how could Monsieur Savard, drunk as he was, by turns seem completely rational and considerate, and then so despicable and two-faced? Does God take into account the good done in a state of intoxication, equally with the evil? To-night's adventure, in which he had participated unwillingly, yet as though drawn by a mysterious force, reminded him of that unforgettable day the year before, when, from the hour of his first meeting with Denis Boucher and Fernande, every minute had been like an explosion, each more intense than the last, up to the very instant of

Madame Boisseau's death. What would be the outcome of this strange tour with a drunkard? New horizons were opening in his mind, but all he could yet see was blackness. He passed a hand over his aching brow.

"Here we are," said Willie Savard. "Draw up at the right of the entrance."

His soul empty, his body numb with fatigue, Pierre stood behind Monsieur Savard at the high oak door. Mother Cecilia herself opened it. She was taller than the old man, and slender; her black veil closely framed her face, but she appeared very beautiful to Pierre, despite a fineness of feature that bordered on emaciation. She said nothing, and looked dubiously at Monsieur Savard.

The drunkard put on for her a smile which he tried to make ingratiating. "How lucky I am to have you," he said.

A question reverberated in Pierre's head—"Are you going to beat *her* up, too?"

The nun began to look fixedly at the package Monsieur Savard held under his arm, and asked with quiet irony, "Are you bringing your food with you?"

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "This is your present. It isn't much."

"Come in." She took the lead, slowly thrusting her keys into her huge pocket. Monsieur Savard, who followed somewhat unevenly, turned his beaming-face toward Pierre. "You see?" he whispered.

They went into the nun's office, and before the drunken man's delighted eyes Mother Cecilia took the wooden carving of the Virgin from the box. She tenderly stroked it as you would a child's cheek, and set it on her desk where she let her eyes dwell on it for a moment. Then, looking at Monsieur Savard, she said, "God will forgive you many sins. . . . So you promise me to be good?"

Willie Savard promised that he would be, thumping the

desk so hard with his fist that the statue fell on its side. Mother Cecilia calmly set it upright again. 'Pierre was astonished at Monsieur Savard's sudden violence. Since their entry into this strange house, whose corridors breathed a nightmare air, the sick man's eyes had clouded over. Where was the rational person of a few minutes back, who had talked so reasonably after the debauch at the hotel? Monsieur Savard seemed to have forgotten Pierre's presence; he had not even introduced him to the nun. Mother Cecilia arose, took the old man's overcoat, and requested him to give her everything he had in his pockets. He emptied them for her with the motions of an automaton. She then asked Pierre his name, and had him promise her that he would stay near the "patient" all night.

She guided them along the corridor leading toward Monsieur Savard's room. They emerged into a vast hall, two storeys high, with a kind of upper deck reached by a wide oak stairway. An electric bulb served as night-light at the foot of these stairs. "Just like a boat!" the young man said to himself, his eyelids drooping again. It seemed to him that the building rolled, perhaps because of the nun, who gave the impression of floating along on her skirts over the waxed floor. Monsieur Savard was now moving hesitantly, as though he felt he was in a den of criminals. Just as he placed his foot on the first step of the stairs, a strident cry was heard. Monsieur Savard gave a hollow groan and threw himself, his teeth chattering, into Pierre's arms.

"That fellow again! He's going to try to kill me during the night."

"Come to bed, Monsieur Savard," said Mother Cecilia's soft voice. "It's only Monsieur Paul dreaming. There's no danger whatever."

Clinging to Pierre and tripping over his feet, Monsieur Savard trembled; when he reached the gallery, which

gave on to rooms reminiscent of a ship's cabins, his eyes widened with fright at seeing door number nine; he staggered as though he were going to tumble down the stairs, but Pierre held him steady and then saw that Mother Cecilia had opened a door on the opposite side and was waiting for them.

"No, no, let's clear out; he's going to kill me!" Savard was weeping with abject fright, and his eyes shone like those of a terrified child. Pierre dragged him forward.

"See now, Monsieur Savard, you promised me to be good," said Mother Cecilia softly. "Look, I've given you twenty-six. It's the best room. There's no danger at all."

Monsieur Savard dashed rather than walked into the room. His first concern was to tear open the closet door, to make sure there was no one there. Then he looked under the bed, straightening abruptly and glancing slyly at Mother Cecilia and Pierre. Pierre noticed that the room was absolutely bare. A bed, a leather arm-chair, a table. Not a glass, not an ornament. On the white wall facing the bed, a picture of Saint Joseph had been painted. Monsieur Savard removed his jacket, and Mother Cecilia beckoned Pierre to join her on the gallery. The drunken man uttered a violent cry: "Pierre, don't go! You promised me!"

Pierre reassured him and remained in the doorway, where Mother Cecilia hastily whispered to him that Monsieur Savard would be stricken with attacks of fright and with the hallucinations characteristic of alcoholism. Pierre would have to sit up in the arm-chair and remain alert. He would probably have to restrain and calm the business man when the attacks were at their worst. If Pierre could not manage, she would be unable to keep the patient, since his outbreaks would disturb the mental cases hospitalized in the clinic. Appalled at the idea of continuing to

act as guide-to-nowhere for this madman, through the streets of Quebec in the dead of night, and, above all, touched by the nun's confidence in him, Pierre agreed with an air of grave attention, which as much as said, "Count on me, Sister, I'll manage all right."

Pierre heard a muttering behind him and turned round. Monsieur Savard in his night clothes was kneeling beside the bed and saying his prayers. Mother Cecilia saw him and came back into the room. She lightly touched his shoulder. "I see you're becoming reasonable. Now go to bed. You're in good company. Sleep."

Monsieur Savard made a quick sign of the cross. He raised toward her his huge face, from which all fear had disappeared, and which was pitifully trying on a look of obedience mixed with boyish archness. "Just a tiny drop in the bottom of a little glass, before I go to bed, eh, Mother? Come on!"

She pointed to the bed, and he slipped quickly under the covers. She walked to the door and said, before closing it, "To-morrow morning, if you've been good."

Without a word to Pierre, Monsieur Savard stretched out, his face toward the wall. Pierre turned the switch.

"For God's sake leave the light on," the old man bellowed, sitting upright. "Otherwise we won't see him come in."

Pierre shrugged his shoulders and complied. Monsieur Savard lay down once more, turning his back, and Pierre sank into the leather arm-chair. His heart was beating faster. His eyes burned; he was not drowsy, and he felt he would never sleep again. Beside him Monsieur Savard was already snoring. Pierre looked at the bulky body as it lay there reassured, comfortably curled up. So the drunken man, despite his intoxication, had all the while obeyed his instinct of self-preservation? He had chosen Pierre as his guardian, he had bought that statue. And now he was

asleep, without having bid Pierre good night, without having thanked him. And suddenly, unexpectedly, Pierre sank into slumber.

Monsieur Paul's piercing cry again tore through the silence of the sanatorium. Pierre did not stir. Monsieur Savard, however, sat bolt upright, quivering, and cried, "Pierre, the door, he's coming! He's got his long needle!"

Not until a second shout had come from Savard did Pierre, torn between the depths of sleep and his drunken charge's terror, open his haggard eyes. "There! Over there!" Monsieur Savard was screaming. His arms held out instinctively before him, Pierre ran for the door, where at last he came completely awake. Furious, and remembering Mother Cecilia's instructions, he took Monsieur Savard by the shoulders and forced him back on the bed, assuring him that nothing was wrong and begging him to be quiet, since otherwise they would be put out of the hospital. The patient struggled, became quiet, heaved a long sigh. Then he murmured, "You're sick, Willie."

"That's right; let's go to sleep," Pierre said with finality as he slipped back into the arm-chair.

But Monsieur Savard seemed to have recovered amazingly; his eyes snapped with impatience, as though he had a host of interesting projects to carry out. He sat up and let his legs hang over the edge of the bed.

"Pierre," he whispered, "we've got to get out of here, run away, hide somewhere. Now I understand: Mother Cecilia is in a plot with my wife and children to hold us prisoner. And you never suspected it? You're a goner, too. They'll give you an injection and put you in a strait-jacket. The downstairs door is always watched; let's get out by the window."

Wearily Pierre explained that this was impossible, since Mother Cecilia had kept Savard's overcoat and wallet in her office. The young man, his eyes laden with sleep,

half saw the heavy chin, lost in its folds of fat, nodding and seeming to agree.

"Well, go out yourself and bring me back a John Dewar."

Pierre suppressed a smile. The old man's heavy, purplish legs swung to and fro while he explained, in full detail, where to get the whisky. Pierre shook his head and told him to wait until morning. Monsieur Savard grunted, and concluded: "Then give me some of that stuff, in the bottle hanging on the wall."

Pierre's glance sought the bottle at which Monsieur Savard's finger pointed with so much assurance, and he burst out laughing. "What you see is a picture of Saint Joseph painted on the wall!"

Disgusted, the old fellow thrust himself back under the covers, muttering and looking ferocious. "Wait until to-morrow; you'll pay for this, the whole lot of you."

Anger hardened his features until they looked like marble. It imbued his flabby voice with an intonation so wicked and so solemn that Pierre felt a brief tremor of apprehension. When would this night end, and when would he find himself free to attend to his own absorbing drama, far from this overpowering demoniac? Monsieur Savard was snoring now. Pierre was young and exhausted. He had only to let his head slump on his chest to fall asleep again.

In the nightmare born from the impressions of this extraordinary evening, he was walking along a forest path and found himself confronting Big Dick, who was mounted on an enormous black horse. The Communist Irishman let out a long, savage peal of laughter, like Monsieur Paul's scream, and spurred the beast, which reared and smashed its front hoofs on Pierre's head; he uttered a hollow cry and finally opened his eyes: Monsieur Savard, his big head outlined in the glare from the electric light bulb, his pale face twisted into an hysterical and murderous

grimace, was brandishing his heavy leather boot with its metal heel-plate. Despite his half-conscious state, Pierre succeeded in warding off the blow with his outstretched arm. Breathing heavily, drooling, laughing with vengeance, the drunken man jumped on him and grasped his throat in the vice of his hands.

"Oh! You little upstart, you'll pay me back my forty-five hundred dollars. You thought you would take them to heaven with your glass of milk? And he dares keep an eye on me as though I were crazy, prevent me from drinking when I'm thirsty—me, Willie Savard! You bastard! Take that!"

Pierre saw the electric light dancing on the ceiling and the maddened eyes of the old man moved to the same rhythm. Every vestige of sleep was gone, leaving his head empty except for the pain that racked him to the base of his neck and made him realize that his deluded patient was actually strangling him. His nostrils contracted, and his blood beat so fiercely that he thought his head would burst. His body was turning limp and cold, and only by chance did one of his thrashing knees hit Monsieur Savard in the paunch and make him loosen his grip. Pierre breathed violently, and succeeded in straightening up; then, with a kind of delight, he hurled himself upon the old sot, threw him down on the bed, and fell on top of him, holding his wrists in a powerful grip. All his strength was coming back to him. The old fellow groaned, and his bulging eyes, loaded with hatred, stared up at Pierre.

"You old coward! You wanted to kill me, eh, when I was trying to help you?"

This treachery filled Pierre with a strange joy. Ended was that feeling of inferiority which older people had come so close to imposing on him for ever. From then on he would defy their corrupt experience, their rotten cunning. Forearmed, perhaps he could confront them all. splendid

and strong? Drops of blood were falling from his forehead on to the sheet, and he thought them so ruby-red that he smiled and forgave the old drunk. A half-hour later he felt the body beneath him relax and sink into an unconsciousness compounded of exhaustion and sleep. He went back to his arm-chair, and wakefulness held him till morning.

At seven the corridors seemed to come to life. The noise of scattered voices and then the hustle and bustle of hospital routine shook the young man from his numbness. He went to the faucet and splashed some water on his face. No mirror. He combed his hair as best he could and tried to measure with his fingers the gash across his brow. Monsieur Savard was still sleeping. Pierre leaned on his elbows at the window and idly watched the doctor's car being parked alongside the green Buick. Toward eight, Mother Cecilia entered the room, cast an amused glance at Willie Savard, and then saw the wound on Pierre's forehead. She said "You poor boy," so sweetly that Pierre blushed to feel his eyes moisten. She asked for no explanation but took him to the supply room where she dressed the injury.

"Is he a relative of yours?"

"No, Sister. I did not even know him. He asked me to accompany him."

She gave him a searching look. "God loves you a great deal," she said. She offered him breakfast, but he refused with a kind of eagerness. Did not his reward await him at home, where his mother would make him his toast the way he liked it?

The nun went back to the room; he followed her. Monsieur Savard was awake. Sitting up in bed, he was contemplating with lack-lustre eyes the breakfast tray that the male nurse had just put on his knees. Pierre stood as though dumbfounded by this grey, flabby wreckage which

a few hours' sleep had cast back upon the strand of reality. When he saw Pierre with his forehead swathed in its bandage, an anxious questioning flickered for a moment in the sick man's eyes; then he quickly lowered them to his tray, and the bitter droop of his mouth suggested despair rather than shame. His limbs were shaking slightly, as though he were on the verge of a chill, and his big fingers fumbled around the coffee cup, whose handle he finally succeeded in grasping. Mother Cecilia went close to Monsieur Savard and promised him a little cognac at nine o'clock.

Pierre grabbed his bag and headed for the door, bidding an awkward good-bye to this stranger whom he had known only in the commotion of a single adventurous night. But just as he was leaving, Monsieur Savard said to him in a muffled voice, "Do wait a minute. I have something to say to you."

Pierre approached the foot of the bed, and at that moment a small man with a tiny face, his mobile features illumined by rapturous joy, came bouncing into the room. His hands bristled with knitting-needles, from which hung a half-finished red wool sock that danced like a marionette under the movements of his tireless fingers.

"Good day, Monsieur Savard. We're returning to our old loves?"

The poor fellow turned briefly to Pierre, and his cracked voice rattled on. "I'm Monsieur Paul. You'll excuse me? Willie Savard is my best friend."

He eagerly moved toward the sick man, who instinctively pushed himself back into the pillow, his eyes fastened on the knitting-needles.

"Ah, my dear Willie, I'm sure I didn't disturb you this time. I slept like an angel. You know, my knitting is going splendidly. I'm at my four-hundred-and-fiftieth pair. And how are things with you?"

Pierre did not hear Monsieur Savard's muttered reply, for at this moment the door opened and Mother Cecilia, glancing toward it, smiled. "Good morning, Chaplain," she said.

Pierre utterly taken aback, dropped his bag. The chaplain, his mouth wide open, was trying to speak. "Pierre!" he finally exclaimed.

It was Father Jerome Lippé, Father "Voltaire," the sceptic, the performer of calisthenics, the photographer, the great friend of that dreadful evening last year. With both of them, joy overcame astonishment. It was a little as though they had suddenly encountered each other on the same raft in an unknown ocean. They did not shake hands.

"Come to my room!"

3

PIERRE hastily muttered a few words promising Monsieur Savard that he would return before leaving the sanatorium, and then almost ran after Father Lippé who, in his delighted amazement, was striding jerkily along the corridor. Exultantly he unbosomed himself to Pierre.

“ Monsieur Paul is the dottiest of the lot. For twenty years he’s been a drug addict, and his nervous system is completely deranged ; he screams at night, pays visits to all the patients the moment he gets up in the morning, and spends the whole day knitting. How in heaven’s name did you ever land here ? You look like a different person ! Come on in. Yes, *Intra, Petre*, as I said to you one evening last June when, with my buttocks on my heels, I was paying homage to ancient Greece. *Intra, Petre*, we have a world of things to talk about.”

For an instant Pierre stood stock-still in the doorway, for Father Lippe’s last sentence had congealed all the joy within him and turned it to secret anguish. He could not unburden himself of what had happened. This man had been the friend of the pure young seminarist ; would he remain the friend of the youth who had been involved in the death of an old lady ? And Pierre had always confessed to one priest alone, Father Loupret ; too often had he missed Mass, too often tried to forget God in the depths of his distress for him to avow, now that his pain was less acute, the terrible circumstances which had made him their victim. He might confide in, but not make confession to, Father Loupret, for Pierre had less a feeling of guilt than of heartrending distress at the thought that his

life as a layman; which he had so yearned to make splendid, should have had so wretched a beginning. And would people believe the amazing tale? During the astounding night he had just lived through, he had not realized that his return to Quebec would lend a new aspect to his tragedy. A gulf would separate him from each friend he met anew, a gulf he would have to hide with endless reticences and falsehoods if he was not to destroy for those who loved him the image of the Pierre they had known.

Father Lippé had not at once noticed Pierre's nervous hesitation. Hopping about like a joyous child, talkative and sententious, he wandered around the room, laying his breviary on a bureau, here shutting a drawer that had been left open, there straightening a curtain.

"But what's the matter? Why are you so pale?"

"Nothing . . . nothing," Pierre stammered. "Perhaps it's because I haven't had breakfast."

"You silly fellow! Just wait a moment! Take this arm-chair."

The priest briefly disappeared into the hall. Sighing, Pierre sat down. At least Father Lippé could be happy at re-discovering an old friend. He looked around him. How true it is that almost any room takes on something of the personality of the occupant; this sanatorium cubicle was strangely like Father Lippé's quarters at the Seminary. The military cot, the two walls dark with photographs, the dresser, the book-shelves—everything was there, even the camera, which, perched on its tripod in a shadowy corner, looked like a woeful mask. Sunk deep in the worn leather of the chair, Pierre delightedly soaked in this familiar atmosphere, linked to a moment in his past when he had been happy. He hoped Father Lippé would not come back too soon, so that he might shed a few of those warm, silent tears which are to pain what a sweet smile is to joy.

Triumphantly Father Lippé returned, bearing a tray.

"Here, my dear Pierre, my dear Rastignac, whom I once compared to Theseus, here's something to cheer you up. Mother Cecilia has just told me about the fine night you spent with that incorrigible Willie Savard. I'm aching to hear about your adventures. Come, come! You're not listening to me!"

Pierre attempted a smile of protest and drew close to the tray which Father Lippé had placed upon a small desk. He grasped the cup of coffee and took several long draughts, his eyes raised toward the wall covered with photographs. "You're keeping up your photography?"

Little by little the joy drained from the priest's face; then he said, in a tone of forced cheerfulness, "For two reasons, when a priest like Father Lippé becomes chaplain of such an establishment as this, where for certain reasons it is desired that he be regarded also as a patient, it is no longer possible for him to devote himself to the great art of photography: first, because the deranged, the insane, are not good subjects for the camera. Grim jesters, taking their lead from Erasmus, have harried the theme that crazy people must be the portion of mankind which has retained its common sense, but the eye of the photographer perceives clearly that they do not represent types: the passions burnt deep upon their features are marks of empty bliss, whereas among normal people those passions are imprinted by the die of purpose. The faces of the insane all bear some resemblance to each other, whereas other men's are infinitely diverse."

Father Lippé turned sadly toward his camera and added: "The other reason is that I have no money to buy film."

Pierre stood up, his hand already in his pocket. "I have five hundred dollars. I can let you have half of it." "

Father Lippé looked at him gently for a moment, shook his head violently, then made Pierre sit down again, tenderly placing his long hand on the young man's head.

"Dear lad. You've not changed a bit. Finish your breakfast. We'll go on talking afterwards."

Father Lippé was deeply moved. His voice had faltered, and now he stiffly turned his back and stared for a long while at the wall. Pierre, disconcerted by the priest's emotion, munched his last piece of toast in silence. Breakfast had made a new man of him, ready to put a good face on things, ready to take an interest in other people's affairs. How had Father Lippé ever landed here?

The priest turned at last and sat down on the cot, heaving a sigh which he managed to translate into words that were almost jovial. "I've had an amazing experience," he said, "but I'm your teacher and I have a right to your confidence before you hear mine."

Pierre clenched his teeth and hid his reluctance by beginning to roll himself a cigarette.

"So, you've taken up smoking?" Father Lippé exclaimed, as though it were of the utmost importance.

"Do you continue your calisthenics?" Pierre asked in his embarrassment.

"Certainly not. Yet this is the one place I could do them without being thought insane. But let's talk about my insanity later on. It's up to you to start the ball rolling, since even between people who have lost their reason, the younger should be the first to give an account of himself. The last time I saw you, you were dashing out to vanquish this city. And to launch this arduous undertaking, cunning Theseus, you started off in search of the monster by burying yourself in the depths of the forest. That young lady you went to visit, after you left me one evening last June, could she by any chance have turned into a female lumberjack?"

Pierre blushed and stammered. His self-confidence had been a mere will-o'-the-wisp; he was at the mercy of the most casual allusion. He felt the heavy burden in his jacket pocket of the newspaper cutting which reported old

Madame Boisseau's funeral, a bit of paper he had kept as a painful, constant reminder, to punish him for not having maintained the high ideal he had set himself before God and man. The image of the dead body flashed before his eyes. Ever since the evening of the tragedy he had seen, many times each day, that rigid corpse, had followed in fancy the course of its decay, and had achieved, as the skeleton gradually lost its covering of flesh, a fleeting serenity that could be destroyed by a simple question such as Father Lippé had asked. What could he say? He answered, on impulse, "Don't talk to me about those people! They disgust me."

I'm lying, he thought at once, abashed. Our first sin makes us liars all our lives. Where was Fernande now? Had she left Denis Boucher? Had he answered her questions when he returned to their room, that dreadful evening?

"Well!" said the priest. "Begin your story wherever you want, then."

Pierre felt his hands grow moist. By these few words Father Lippé was granting that Pierre had ugly things to hide. And the March sun was flooding into the room, and the droplets of melting snow sang their song from one end of the building to the other.

"I'll begin at the beginning!" he cried. "Those two people, when I went to see them after I left you, said to me things that destroyed my eagerness, made me feel small and weak in this ignoble world. I went off to the woods to earn money to support my mother."

His forehead covered with sweat, he talked slowly, with effort, as halting and cautious as though he were giving a detective an alibi—an alibi indeed, which he had memorized while living through the anguish of those first days. He related the harsh experience of work in the forest, of his meeting with Big Dick, the strike, the *Das Kapital* episode,

his fight with the Irishman, and the adventure with Monsieur Savard.

"Amazing!" exclaimed Father Lippé, jumping up like a jack-in-the-box. "Karl Marx has brought us both here. Yes, Pierre, Karl Marx! What mysterious designs does Providence hold in store for us, when it uses that dreadful man to reunite us?"

As was his wont when he was the prey of inward excitement, Father Lippé strode up and down with the jerky pace of a worried general, cracking the joints of his long, bony fingers. His features, which had been drawn taut by the eager attention he gave Pierre's story, now seemed to expand with exaltation. He grasped a chair and solemnly installed himself in front of the flabbergasted young man.

"Now listen to *my* story. And I shan't gloss over any important details. Two months after your departure—which is to say, in September—a Franciscan, Father Martel, lately returned from Germany where he had lived for six years, proposed to the Rector of the University that there be inaugurated in the Faculty of Social Sciences a new section open to the general public. Its special and principal aim would have been to deepen its students' political ideas by making a comparative study of Marxism and democracy, dealing with their origins, their evolution, their practical application to the twentieth century, and their degree of compatibility with Christian doctrine. According to Father Martel—and he is quite right—before blindly brandishing atomic bombs, our America should first identify and define the essence of her enemy's doctrines; she should look into the doctrines by which she herself was shaped, instead of withdrawing into her shell and branding indiscriminately as Communist all ways of life that fail to conform to her own, or challenge her immaturity. The loud-mouthed and ignorant manipulators who wave the

scarecrow of Communism without even knowing its basic principles, and who often hold important posts in our political parties, are a far greater danger to our security than the Russians' increasing hold on China. In our day any culture, however well bolstered with the humanities, which does not number among its attainments a philosophic and social knowledge of politics is inadequate.

"Well, Pierre, his Lordship the Rector said No, pointing out that Marxism was studied in the Faculty of Philosophy. He said No, perhaps with an eye to the government in power, with which he maintains the most cordial relations possible, to the government in power which might take a dim view of the creation of a teaching programme in the University open to all comers and dedicated to a full exposition of democratic principles, thus calling attention to the shameless abuses marking our political life. Nor must one forget that by unmasking the Communist myth and placing it within a definite concept which our politicians would hardly recognize, Father Martel loomed as a serious threat to the autonomy of our rulers in the field of political education. In a word, his Lordship the Rector said No. But good Father Martel, who in Germany had met more redoubtable adversaries than his Lordship the Rector, far from giving up his project, gave it broader scope. Last November he established an independent school called the Popular Institute of Political Sciences, within a stone's throw of the Grand Seminary. I was among the first to enrol as a pupil.

You can readily understand the shock I gave my colleagues by this overt approval, and the quiet persecution of which I became the victim. The Institute was an instant success. Instead of contenting themselves with the Faculty of Social Sciences, some fifty young people registered for Father Martel's courses, and the quarters at his disposal are too small to receive all the workers who want to take

the night courses. The University and the Government were upset and grow more and more upset, and Father Martel is killing himself in his efforts to repel their attacks. As for me, I was quickly laid low by the blows of persecution.

"One evening last November, toward eight o'clock, while I was awaiting a young priest who, like you, had impressed me because of the nobility of his features and to whom I had earlier uttered scathing comments on my sets of photos, I heard a discreet knock on my door. I was wearing running-shorts and performing my usual exercises. Thinking it was my friend, I continued my calisthenics and called out, '*Intra, amigo!*' thus mingling Latin and Spanish to please the young chap, who had a high regard for Franco. The door opened. Horrors! It was the Superior of the Grand Seminary. I dashed into my closet to put on my cassock, and when I returned I found the Superior studying the photographs on my Wall 'A,' which—you remember?—was dedicated to the hollow faces. Then he leafed through *Das Kapital*, which was lying on my desk beside my breviary. I expected a reprimand and a request for explanations. He said nothing and recommended that I go to bed, sympathizing over my look of fatigue. I slept badly. The next morning the Superior returned to my room with a very solemn gentleman whom he gently described as a psychiatrist. His prescription; this sanatorium, though I was quite well enough to serve as its chaplain. The young priest replaced me as professor of literature, and my neighbour, that fat Father Benoît, was at last able to take possession of my room, with its window overlooking the river, which he had coveted for ten years. I don't know which of the two, Father Benoît or the young hispanophile, had laboured to effect my downfall, but I forgive them."

Father Lippé stopped speaking and looked attentively at Pierre, waiting for his reaction. Pierre, dumbfounded by the story, could think of nothing better to say than, "I can't

believe it ! ” and therefore remained silent. Then he impulsively grasped Father Lippé’s hand and pressed it hard. “ Would you like me to enrol in Father Martel’s course ? ” he asked.

Father Lippé resumed his pacing around the room. “ Not only that ; I’d like you to become his secretary. He is worn out, exhausted ; what’s more, he has heart disease. In association with him an extraordinary future awaits you. I’ll write you a note of introduction, and you’ll go see him at my behest this very afternoon.”

“ Of course ! Naturally I’ll go.”

What a prospect of limitless horizons ! His mind, his whole soul, trembled with impatience, and the leashed strength of his body, his rippling muscles, rejoiced at the news of the task ahead. He took the note and, in lieu of thanks, said to Father Lippé, “ Within a month I’ll have you out of here and we’ll join forces.”

“ Good luck, Pierre.”

It was because of his own joy that Pierre remembered to bid Monsieur Savard good-bye before leaving the clinic. The old fellow did not stir when he saw Pierre come in. His lack-lustre eyes seemed more and more misted in contemplation of something sad and far away. “ So you’re leaving ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur Savard. Good-bye.”

“ Wait a moment ! My proposition still holds. Will you be my secretary ? ”

Pierre shook his head, smiling rapturously. “ No, thanks — and good luck ! ”

He did not notice the cloud of distress that enveloped the other’s face, and at a run, he dashed from the sanatorium and jumped on to a bus headed for the centre of the city.

So overwhelmed was the young man at the promising vistas opened up for him by the prospect of becoming Father Martel's right arm, so eagerly and boldly did his imagination play with the possibilities, that he did not even notice a pregnant woman who had found no seat and had to stand throughout the long journey with only the back of his seat to lean against. The bus took one of the bridges across the Saint Charles River and then began to scale the slopes of Quebec. To appreciate and understand that city, you must win her ; as with a mountain, you must start at the foot and climb gently toward the beauties adorning her summit. Yesterday Pierre would assuredly have seen the pregnant woman and would have hastened to offer her his place ; yesterday he would have roted with eager emotion the streets which one by one the bus ground past, its gears constantly and vexatiously shifting ; yesterday he would have been the first to reach the sidewalk, avidly breathing the spring air of his beloved town. But to-day, after a year of sorrow and fear, he had suddenly reached an open space on his life's journey which luminously smiled upon his zeal and his devotion. Mechanically he let himself be jostled toward the exit by a group of hurried passengers. Youville Square ; Saint John Street ! He was only a few steps from home. Before his eyes rose the vision of his mother, who did not expect him and who would be transfixed with surprise and joy. He would say, " I'm home for good, Mama ! " and nothing more. He would stow away his possessions and life would go on happily ; in the evenings he would study, his ageing mother close by, and each morning he would dash off to that Popular Institute where, with

Father Martel, he was working out the basis of a new education.

A florist's window caught his eager glance. Why not? He had never bought his mother any flowers. He entered and asked for a dozen roses. As he was tucking the box under his arm, he saw a black-edged card ready to be inscribed with someone's condolences, and his throat tightened. Again his joy withered and turned to anguish at the thought of the cemetery where Madame Boisseau lay. Had he been alone, he would have wept.

But, for the first time since the evening of the tragedy, he felt within him what seemed a multitude of hands lifted to protect the tremulous hope that shone upon his future. Was it not high time for him to cease letting himself be drawn supinely toward the abyss? He had not willed that death! If he was to regain possession of all his powers, if he was to dedicate himself to happiness and to the apostolate that beckoned him, should he not free himself of all those bitter memories, paying them off like old debts, snaring them like troublesome enemies? He bought flowers for Madame Boisseau's grave; he bought flowers for Madame Savard, whom he had not been able to protect and who had called him a tramp. With all three boxes under his arm, he hailed a taxi. "To Belmont Cemetery!" he told the driver. Once he had appeased his conscience with regard to the two old ladies, he could abandon himself to the joy of clasping his mother in his arms.

His search for the stone marking the Boisseau family plot—his feet splashing through the puddles in the cemetery paths and his anguished eyes bewildered at the sight of the endless crosses protruding from the thick, heavy snow—reminded him of an earlier expedition he had made one evening in childish bravado to a graveyard near his home. His legs were now just as shaky and his heart was beating

to the same terrified rhythm. Yet the sun was shining gloriously, he was twenty years old, and he was bringing flowers to the burial place of an aged woman dead these many months. His worried glance exaggerated every detail. A mausoleum looked to him like the prison where he might have been confined, and a tiny drop falling from the INRI affixed to a cross seemed to him like a huge tear. He meticulously followed the instructions supplied him by the cemetery caretaker and suddenly found himself confronting the stone he had so greatly dreaded. He tightened his jaw to reassure himself that his teeth were not chattering. Stealthily he surveyed his surroundings. Then he knelt down for a moment and prayed ardently, with all his soul. "Madame, restore my peace of heart ! I beg it of you !"

But someone might see him, might wonder about him ! Why had he without reflection obeyed his impulse and rushed to this place ? His first torments, in the days when he had taken every newcomer for a policeman in disguise, assailed him anew. Never should he have come to this cemetery. He felt just as hunted now as he had at the time of the tragedy. His staring eyes seemed spellbound by the thick snow that covered the grave, as though they were fearful of seeing it part, like a shroud, to disclose the accusing skeleton. Pierre started to lay down the box of flowers, but his suspicious glance discovered no trace of any other flowers near the surrounding crosses. Were the Letelliers to find these solitary roses, they would start an investigation ! Who, for what reasons, had brought roses to this grave, and in winter at that ? The investigator would seek out the florist, and he would remember Pierre, that odd young man who had bought three boxes of roses !

And suddenly, without his will playing any part in the matter, his legs started carrying him in a mad flight toward the cemetery gate ; his body was clammy, his head was bent as he ran, and the jiggling boxes held at arm's length

made him look like an animated scarecrow. Watching him, the cemetery caretaker muttered to himself that he had been quite right in thinking there was something queer about this strange young fellow.

Exhausted, wild-looking, Pierre, surrounded by his boxes, was slumped in the taxi on his way back to town. He had automatically given Monsieur Savard's address, for street names and numbers were the only bearings left to his intelligence. He was not ashamed, he did not reproach himself: "Pierre Boisjoly, you're a coward; or at least you should have thought a moment before buying those flowers." He was merely a pitiful child still at grips with the last tremors of a dreadful fear. He thought of nothing; his stricken mind was concentrated on the terror which slowly oozed from his being as the taxi carried him farther from the cemetery. His ears were buzzing.

Now he was standing rigid, at the foot of the Savards' steps. The taxi drew away, and Pierre did not turn around lest he betray the sheer terror which was again overpowering him. He remained motionless for several seconds.

What was he doing here? Was not his desire to prove to Madame Savard that he was no tramp by bringing her these flowers as silly as his having dashed off to the cemetery? He was seized by a sudden anger against all his remorse. From his pocket he extracted the clipping about Madame Boisseau's funeral and tore it into bits. He must learn to hate his remorse. Would he some day be rid of it? He would give his mother all the flowers. Then a thought occurred to him which calmed him somewhat by virtue of its obviousness—"Thirty-six roses are a lot." A smile spread over his lips, and he was so delighted at its soothing effect upon his feverishness that he kept it, frozen on his features, the whole time he was striding toward his mother's apartment—a smile made quite idiotic by the three boxes of flowers.

He started to knock on the door but changed his mind, the better to surprise his dear mother into whose arms he wanted to throw himself. Never had he made such a gesture as the one he would make to-day. They would not say much to each other; he would rock gently in the creaky chair and would quietly roll a cigarette, while his mother arranged the flowers near the windows. He pushed open the door, stepping into the kitchen; there the spectacle that greeted his eyes dumbfounded him so completely that he let one of the boxes of roses tumble to the floor. A man with thinning grey hair, unshaven, wearing suspenders, was holding his mother by the waist and making her laugh just as though she were his wife. At the sound of the box striking the floor, Madame Boisjoly turned around, grew pale, and stammered, but could not bring herself to say "Pierre!" He smiled timidly and retrieved the box. He did not stretch out his arms; he just stood there and repeated, like a broken victrola record, "I've decided to come back to town. . . . I've decided to come back to town. . . ."

His mother was wearing a stick and her hair was carefully gathered in a bun. Never had he seen her so dressed up. She did not advance to greet him; an awkward smile barely parted her lips, but her eyes were moist.

"Of course you don't know Monsieur Charles. To help pay the rent I took him in as a boarder. And . . . of course he has your room."

"Oh! It's your boy, my dear, the one you've told me about so often, the woodsman? Glad to meet you, my young friend."

He heartily extended a hand toward Pierre, who grasped it mechanically and stared as though it were some strange object. Then he recovered from his shock and angrily withdrew his hand. They addressed each other as intimate friends! This intruder put his arm around his mother's

waist, and was installed in his own former bedroom ! And the Goya reproduction ? Probably torn off the wall and thrown away !

" Give me your bag, my little Pierre ! Meanwhile you can sleep with Joseph." Monsieur Charles, why don't you go for your daily stroll, so I can have a chat with Pierre ? "

Pierre felt his heart heavy at the thought of explanations that would plunge him once more into a world from which he had withdrawn while he was yet a child, and could serve only to make his mother even more of a stranger to him. He had always viewed himself as launched like a meteor toward some extraordinary fate, while his mother and his brother Joseph, the fireman, wallowed in a stagnation from which there was no withdrawal. Now another being had joined them in this quagmire. Pierre spoke hurriedly.

" No, Mama ; I just dropped in to say hello. I have some people to meet in a few moments. Don't worry about the room ; I'll get a place of my own. And I'll be back this afternoon or to-morrow. Good-bye."

He found himself back on the sidewalk, moving along at a rapid pace and sighing fitfully. His mother had stood motionless, powerless to hold him, despite the two tears which had spilled over her aged cheeks. Pierre had tried to avoid seeing those tears, and he wished he could deny their existence, yet he could not forget that fraction of a second when he had seen those big stupid eyes dimmed and blinded. He must return and, this time, take her in his arms. What loyalty of his was outraged, that jealousy should gnaw at him ? Had he not made up his mind to leave his mother for ever when he decided to become a priest, or when he fled into the forest ? If he had dreamed of a splendid destiny for himself, had not his mother at least the right to a Monsieur Charles ? The thought of this man clasping his mother's waist, and the reproduction of Goya's Christ torn, in his imagination, from the wall,

dispelled his emotion. He stopped in his tracks and surveyed the boxes of flowers with a hardened eye. Not far away he noticed a yawning trash-can. No one was in sight. He hurled the flowers into the can and looked at his hands.

Then he grabbed his bag and walked off at random, a prey to mounting panic. Where to cast anchor? No port would accept him. And he had at least forty more years to live! The Institute! Father Lippé had suggested that he call on Father Martel that afternoon. Pierre stuck his hand nervously in his pocket and fingered the letter of introduction. Delay was by now unbearable. He would go see the friar at once. He must know the outcome of this crisis immediately and not interrupt the rhythm of events which since yesterday had swept him along in their strange course.

The Institute was located in the Latin Quarter, in an abandoned boarding-house, Father Lippé had said. Automatically his steps veered toward that quaint Couillard Street where first he had met Denis Boucher. He turned back, and walked up Ramparts Street toward the University.

At last he found the old house. On the glass of its shaky door there appeared, in hastily painted white letters, *Popular Institute of Political Sciences—Father Martel*. And in smaller lettering, without capitals: *afternoon and evening classes only*. When he opened the door he found himself at once in a hallway, the floor of which was deeply worn and studded with knots.

“What can I do for you, young man?”

Pierre started, and then he saw on his right, in a cubby-hole that had somehow been converted into an office, first the bare feet shod in sandals, then the Franciscan's emaciated body leaning over a shabby kitchen table. This table was heaped with papers which the long, nervous hands were attempting to put in order, without success.

the confusion being too great. So shining and vibrant were the priest's eyes that they seemed to light up even his red beard which was short and trimmed to a point at the chin. The close-cropped hair, the wide, square forehead, the nervous energy which kept his features constantly in motion and seemed to propel his body from task to task—all this suggested a man of action overburdened with ideas.

"Father Martel?"

"Yes."

The Franciscan kept his pipe between his teeth and continuing rummaging among his papers.

"If you are a new pupil, I really don't know where I can fit you in. We haven't enough chairs, the students have to take their notes against the walls, and there are only two of us to do the teaching."

Pierre smiled his denial and handed him Father Lippé's letter.

"I am a former pupil of Father Lippé's, and he asked me to give you this."

"Oh!"

Father Martel tore open the envelope and read the letter, which he then tossed on the desk. He filled his pipe and stroked his beard, holding Pierre's eyes with his long, clear gaze.

"So you are poor?"

"Yes."

"You have just come out of the forest, where you worked as a lumberjack?"

"Yes."

"I can't take you."

Pierre was not surprised. What did one more disappointment matter! It had always been thus, from his earliest childhood. He excused himself with a shrug of the shoulders and murmured a smothered, "Thank you." His forehead had beaded with perspiration. He headed for the door.

"Wait a moment!"

Father Martel had jumped ahead of him and was waving his arms and blocking the way.

"At least wait while I explain why. I certainly do need you. But I can't take the risk, not for the moment at any rate. You see this building; do you think I obtained it with money raised for the missions? A bank lent me the money on the strength of my project and, of course, with a friend's guaranty. However, since this institute was established, have been the object of attacks and all sorts of intrigue. Even the University does not regard me too kindly. Father Lippé must have explained this to you. Among the many rumours circulating about me there is one which hints that several of my pupils are sympathizers with or even members of the Communist Party, and even that my courses are better suited to convert virgin minds to Marxism than to bolster their democratic loyalty. The bank likes neither these rumours nor Marxism. And so, you see, I am about to be required to pay back the loan."

Father Martel expressed himself volubly and with many gestures; while he talked, he had seized Pierre by the sleeve and made him sit down at his desk. Now he crossed his arms and leaned toward him. "If I take you as my secretary people will at once say, 'See! He goes fishing for his assistants among the proletariat; he surrounds himself with bright young fellows embittered by poverty.' Oh! If only you were the son of a family that could be described as 'all right.'"

"Then I'll come back when I'm rich!"

Pierre had said this like an automaton, with mechanical enthusiasm. He got up abruptly, his eyes full of defiance. "Good-bye, Father. We'll meet again soon, or never."

Puzzled, Father Martel followed this strange young man into the hallway. His head bent forward, Pierre moved quickly. He felt himself powerful, and that was all. No

thought, no memory crossed his mind ; his eyes were dilated with exaltation and his brain, so flaccid these many weeks past, had stiffened with determination into a hard cube 'whose edges seemed to press against the framework of his head.' At the moment he was marching along beside Montmorency Park which, bristling with cannon and overhanging the harbour, was now deserted. He half ran to one of the empty benches and slumped down on it, worn out from the crisis of despair which, in its last paroxysm, had turned him into this resolute robot. A deep sigh sprang from his very depths and strangled him. Then, his face buried in his arms, he began to sob like a small child, whimpering, " Mama ! "

A long white hand flecked with reddish hair darted out of a wide brown sleeve and touched the back of his neck. " My little one ! "

Father Martel tried to raise Pierre's head, and Pierre furiously rubbed his face against his arms to wipe away the traces of tears.

" My little one ! I've thought it over. I'll take you on. You understand ? So come along. Come ! "

O light ! O miracle ! O God !

5

It was exactly twelve o'clock when Father Martel sent Pierre off, fixing their next meeting for that afternoon. The two hours that followed seemed a brief period of repose in his consuming adventure. He ate rapidly at a lunch counter and went in search of a room, which he found the moment his eyes happened to light upon a door on Parloir Street.

He shaved hastily, but without cutting himself, stretched out on his bed, and began to hum "*Le Cor*." Instead of reviewing the events which had jostled him since the evening before, in his happiness his mind jumped far back and hit upon one of those occasions when, with the Minor Seminary as his audience, he had let his fine bass voice ring out.

Then came the hour appointed for his return. Whistling, he strode triumphantly along the winding street in the Latin Quarter that led to the Institute.

His two feet on the desk and leaning far back in a swivel chair, Father Martel was examining a document. Pierre coughed. The Franciscan lowered the document, and his feet as well. "Well, here's a good beginning," he remarked. "The electric light bill. Twenty-two dollars, and we haven't a cent in the cash-box. You'll arrange to take care of it."

Pierre smiled and displayed the roll of bills which swelled his hip pocket. Startled, Father Martel removed his pipe from his mouth and watched as Pierre imperturbably counted out the twenty-two dollars.

"You wouldn't by any chance have two thousand more?"

That's the amount of the first payment owing to the bank in two weeks."

Shamefacedly Pierre admitted that he had barely five hundred dollars, but Father Martel laughed so heartily at having to admit that he was himself unable to pay Pierre any salary that the young man soon joined his own joyous laughter to the Franciscan's. Then the priest frowned, and lit his pipe.

"Now let's talk of pressing and serious matters." He arose, closed the little window that gave on the street, and, after glancing carefully into the hallway, closed the door. Then he returned to his desk, leaned his elbows on it, and examined Pierre searchingly.

"It's sad to have to say it, but ever since I founded this school I've discovered that the truest of all sayings is, 'Even the walls have ears.' Pierre. Boisjoly, are you afraid of dirty business?"

"I'm afraid of nothing," Pierre replied sharply, his eyes fastened upon this man; so red was his colouring in his brown habit that he almost seemed ready to burst into flames.

"Good. You'll have your fill of it. For the moment I'll not go into the details of our programme of studies. We must face more pressing problems. Your account of the strike organized by the Communists, your knowledge of Karl Marx, your solid grounding and your intelligence, which impressed me as very keen, make it needless for me to tell you a host of things which you will take on as ordinary cargo during your course of service aboard this ship. Pierre, I am persecuted. I am persecuted in so scheming and vulgar a way that I wonder whether I'll be able to survive it."

Instead of being downcast by this admission, Pierre almost rejoiced in it. Quenching his jaws he said, as though swearing an oath, "I'll see to it that those who slander you get their deserts!"

"Not so fast, young man ; it's no easy job. They are many and powerful," said the Franciscan, languidly waving a hand.

Then he began to study Pierre who, sensing the priest's dubiousness, flexed his muscles and arched his whole body in defiance.

"Pierre Boisjoly, do you know of whom you remind me ? Of one of those fierce Nazis, not tamed in the least by defeat. I met a handful of them in Germany. They are a bit like lions trying to bite blocks of stone. Their zeal is wonderful, but it produces nothing. I like people to be very zealous, but also very clever."

"There are others besides Nazis who like to fight and triumph !" Pierre was nettled and out of patience.

Father Martel seemed not to notice his irritation, and asked him point-blank : "So you had another reason than my refusal, for this morning's tears ?"

"Certainly, but your refusal was part of it. I must have a reason for living."

"That pleases me. We'll get on well together."

The priest moved toward the door and cast another glance into the hall ; then he returned to his desk and opened one of its drawers. From it he extracted a poster, which he handed to Pierre.

"Look at that. For a week, now, ghosts have been busy affixing such things to the telephone poles in this neighbourhood, to doors in the University, and I have even found these foul and sacrilegious caricatures, in which, of course, I'm always the leading figure, pinned to the door of this very room."

Pierre, because of his feeling of outrage and his respect for Father Martel, immediately averted his eyes from the drawing, which depicted the Franciscan in bright red, his beard exaggeratedly long and flaming shaggily, like tongues of vivid fire. To a group of kneeling workers, each resembling

Stalin, he held out, so that they might kiss it, a cross twisted to resemble a hammer and sickle.

"It's terrible, Father!"

"Yes, it's terrible," the Franciscan burst out, "but what is even more terrible is that these phantoms keep right on putting up such posters, all pretty much alike, and nobody stops them. I complained to the Attorney-General, and then I complained again; he merely replies politely that his men are seeking the guilty persons, but with no success. Perhaps they really *are* ghosts! At the University they are indignant; at the Department of Justice they are indignant; I am indignant—but the dirty business continues! My superiors, who have proved their boundless confidence in me, are beginning to be worried by such scandal and by the pressure brought to bear on them to make me quit."

The Franciscan's body was shaking violently. His hand clasped the cross that hung on his breast, and caressing it gently, he grew calm. Pierre turned aside and looked again at the caricature.

"Obviously my teaching can arouse discussion," the Franciscan continued, his voice now under control. "I am convinced that among the workers who follow my night courses there are at least two who are members of the Communist Party. I recognize, behind the questions they so innocently ask, the stock 'sticklers' of Marxism. But, good Lord! give me time to organize my staff, to sort out my pupils! Tell me, Pierre, and frankly! Don't you believe that in this day and age, when men appeal to political principles as a reason for waging war, we simply have to educate people in those principles and teach them in their true frame of reference?"

"I do believe so," said Pierre, "and this afternoon I'll go to see the Attorney-General. Because, if I understand rightly," he added as he arose, "the Government deliber-

ately closes its eyes to this persecution while pretending to deplore it."

"Come, come! Not so fast! You catch fire quickly! What will you tell the Attorney-General? That you are the fellow who invented gunpowder? He'll courteously send you on your way, and the persecution will be worse than ever."

Pierre toyed for an instant with the handle of the door. He was trembling with eagerness. "I don't yet know what I'll say. But I'm sure I'll dream up something better than gunpowder. Have faith in me. I'll do the trick." Here it was again, that same thirst to do instant battle with a difficulty.

When he entered the government offices, Pierre was paying no more attention to what he would say to the Attorney-General than he paid to the white-capped giants of the Provincial Police on guard duty before the great doors of the main entrance. "Just like a movie," he thought. Only yesterday aghast at the sight of a dead deer, and now almost running to the Attorney-General to demand justice for a Popular Institute of Political Sciences. Events were linking themselves together as though Someone had arranged each move in advance.

Then his enthusiasm evaporated. Was this not a repetition of his silly dash to the cemetery? He began thinking of Father Martel and was astonished that their conference had not lasted longer, that their acquaintance was really so slight, and that the mere mention of the Attorney-General should have made him jump to his feet and rush here. Ought he not to have waited a few days, and studied more deeply the problems of the Institute? What more did he know about it than what he had learned from Father Lippé's outburst and the few scraps of information Father Martel had given him? How strange it all was!

Suddenly, a doubt shot like an arrow from the depths of his being, and he blanched. Was this not immanent justice which, weary of seeing him unpunished and indeed almost freed of all remorse, had decided to strike? Immanent justice which, to fulfil certain natural laws, was subjecting him inexorably to a staccato series of events that would finally land him before the desk of the Province's first law officer? He saw himself arrested, then hanged—Pierre, the seeker after Splendour!

"What can I do for you?" asked the doorman of the Department of Justice, cutting his reflections short.

In a low yet impressive voice Pierre said, "I am Father Martel's secretary, from the Popular Institute of Political Sciences. I wish to see the Attorney-General right away. It's a very serious matter."

The man disappeared behind an imposing door of carved oak. Pierre had shut his eyes. If his fears were justified, was it not now his task to bring things superbly to their conclusion? Compared to him, how little to be pitied were the most wretched people he had known! His mother, Madame Savard, Willie Savard—they, at least, were old; at some moment in their lives they had had their chance for greatness, and they were not going to die on the scaffold.

The limping doorman in his threadbare black suit was bending toward him, his mocking bow accompanied by an obsequious smile. "Mr. Secretary, the Attorney-General will be happy to see you. Please come in."

This bow and smile increased Pierre's misery. He tried to throw out his chest, but his shoulders scarcely straightened; it was as though, suddenly stripped of flesh, he had tried to move muscles he no longer possessed. His feet dragged in the purple carpet of the imposing room, in the midst of which glistened the long mahogany desk. The Attorney-General, spinning a gold paper-knife between his fingers,

watched his approach with amusement and curiosity. Then, abruptly he stood up and advanced swiftly toward Pierre, who halted in his tracks. Was the indictment about to be uttered ? ”

“ Make yourself comfortable, Monsieur. Take this arm-chair.”

Hesitantly, Pierre sat down on the edge of the chair. It wasn't going to happen ? He seemed to be treated with respect. A tall man elegantly dressed in a navy-blue suit, the Attorney-General for an instant embodied in Pierre's eyes the sum of human justice. White hair and a moustache with bluish highlights accentuated the genial distinction of a face unmarred by any wrinkle.

“ So,” said the Attorney-General, returning to his seat with an air of gaily restrained flippancy, “ the Institute is making headway and can now afford a secretary ? ”

Pierre pursed his lips to hide from this man the long sigh of relief that emptied his lungs. His foolish imagination had upset him for nothing, then. No one here was accusing him ! It was remarkable how quickly he regained his composure ; even more remarkable was his ability to rid himself instantly of a shattering anguish and grow so vibrant with energy that the fervour of his reply smacked of arrogance.

“ I am not a paid secretary, sir ! ”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed the Attorney-General, bursting into open laughter. “ Things like that always surprise me. But when you begin playing around with Marx, that's the way it is ; it doesn't pay.”

Pierre's ear was still enjoying the forcible bluntness with which he had denied receiving any pay. He at once parried, “ With Christ it didn't pay, either ! ”

He blushed and, ill at ease, began to worry about the sharp tone he had taken with the Attorney-General. The latter quickly seized his advantage. “ So you admit,” he

said, "that your famous Institute has Communist tendencies?"

"I said nothing of the sort," Pierre vehemently protested.

"Enough of this childish discussion! Now tell me what your chief wants from me."

"It's those odious caricatures. More of them were posted last night—some twenty of them, all over the Latin Quarter."

Scowling, the Attorney-General brusquely opened a file. "Tell Father Martel that my men are working tirelessly to find the guilty ones, who must be very skilful, for our ablest detectives have as yet found no clue as to their identity."

Pierre arose and, not realizing his audacity, transfixed the imperturbable official with an angry stare, his lips curling in scorn. He began in a very soft voice which hardened and grew biting after the first few words. "What a farce! I'm frankly very dubious about your detectives' zeal. Crimes are committed and passed off as natural deaths. Sacrilegious caricatures make the rounds, aimed at a Franciscan priest, and the police arrest no one."

"Tell me, young man. Exactly what are you insinuating?" The Attorney-General slapped the file of papers together and, red with anger, struck his desk with a satiny fist.

Suddenly Pierre felt very strong, happy to confront this important man and not be overawed by him. He spoke slowly. "Mr. Attorney-General, I mean what I say. And what's more I came here to warn you that if your detectives cannot find those who are guilty, I'll make it my business to do so. With your permission I'll bring them to you right here, in front of your mahogany desk."

The chief law officer, torn between anger and astonishment, opened his mouth wide. Then his eyes twinkled and he decided to laugh, pointing an interrogatory finger at Pierre. "Certainly I give you permission. You'll need a

truck, for I believe there are several of them. Have you got a truck ? ”

Pierre held out his hands. “ These will probably suffice. Thanks for the authorization. I’ll get busy at once. Please excuse me.”

“ Wait a moment ! ” The Attorney-General moved toward him, his neck outstretched in curiosity. “ Tell me, young fellow ; how old are you ? ”

“ Twenty.”

“ I suspected as much. And your name ? I seem to have met you somewhere before.”

Pierre’s throat grew dry. Was the great man playing him, like a fish, to the very end ? Pierre Boisjoly’s photograph and fingerprints must be in the Department’s files.

“ My name will mean nothing to you—Pierre Boisjoly.”

Before Pierre’s tortured eyes the Attorney-General stroked his chin and probed his memory. Then he asked, “ Would you perchance be the Pierre Boisjoly who last year finished the classical course at the head of his class ? The one who had a religious vocation, and suddenly dropped out of sight ? ”

Pierre found strength to murmur, “ Yes, I’m the same one.”

The older man looked him over at length, and then said, in a tone that sounded to Pierre as solemn as a judge’s sentence, “ I am Yvon Letellier’s uncle.”

“ You are ? ”

“ You didn’t know it ? ”

“ Oh yes, of course ! Now I remember,” sputtered Pierre, choking with terror.

How cunningly Providence had led him toward this man and it had happened quickly—twenty-four hours. Now he remembered : at the Seminary there had been much kow-towing to the arrogant Yvon because of an important government post occupied by one of his relatives. But in

those days Pierre, enchanted by the magic of his religious vocation, had not paid much attention to this celebrated connection of his opponent's. "And now, brought low by his discovery, he had not the strength to pull himself together. "I didn't know. Please forgive me," he murmured, and Pierre bent his head.

"What a strange lad!" the Attorney-General said to himself, his curiosity more and more aroused. So this was the boy who had outdistanced Yvon, a student stamped with genius if he were to credit his sister-in-law, Huguette. True enough, Yvon was very clever; a brilliant political career awaiting him. But he read too many European books, and unduly complicated the facts of the French-Canadian problem. Huguette had brought the child up badly. Yvon would become somebody, but under the tutelage of his uncle, the Attorney-General. And now, by a strange set of circumstances, the charwoman's brilliant son stood before him and demanded an accounting in the name of that Institute. For the time being, certainly, he would have to take him down a peg or two, teach him a good lesson. A malicious glow suddenly lit up the older man's eyes: "You can be on your way. . . . What more do you want?"

Pierre cautiously arose and, in a daze, walked toward the door, timidly nodding good-bye to the Attorney-General. The latter did not budge, but his forehead wrinkled. This headstrong child might become dangerous. He must take care of that.

"Listen, young man. A word of advice before you go. For heaven's sake don't waste your time on that outfit, alongside a maniac with political crotchets. •What good does all that do us? Are we not a happy, prosperous people? Don't fall into the trap set by those educators who yearn for anything novel and want to transplant European problems to our country. Remember what I'm

telling you. There is so promising a future here for a young man like you that it is sad to see you misguided. Good-bye."

Pierre found himself back in the outer office. He felt he must push himself along to reach the hall. It was like a dream; his legs were made of cotton wool and would not obey him. How long the corridor was, and how narrow it seemed! So narrow that Pierre felt as though he were forcing his way to the exit between two walls that wedged him in.

At last he was outside. Life, springtime, freedom, and the joyful squashing of his footsteps in the melting snow! What he must do was never let himself be beaten down, but charge ahead without a backward glance. To accept defeat is to cut short all interesting developments; struggle, even desperate struggle, often yields an unexpected solution. The vernal air, the street noises, the sight of the old dwellings began to calm his fever and transform his hallucinations into lucid thoughts. First of all, he had not killed Madame Boisseau. True enough. But who would believe him? Why not openly admit the accident, and thus free his life from the constraint that smothered its every moment? Admission is the act of a dying man or of a coward. It would leave him with no recourse but to submit piously for the rest of his life to the punishment that others would impose on him for his complicity in this business. Whereas if he kept his secret to himself, he could accumulate enough great deeds during the long years ahead to confound his judges when the moment of his official condemnation arrived. Not to confess—that was the more difficult course. The idea stimulated him. He would fight them all, especially the Attorney-General, because that official was the biggest menace.

On the whole, he was well pleased, since every instant of his life was so intense. He rubbed his hands. If the

Attorney-General was in league with the distributors of the posters, he would warn them of this young Sherlock Holmes, even if the Attorney-General thought he was a bit of an idiot. That notion made Pierre smile. "I'll show them the stuff I'm made of." He admitted to himself that he had gone rather far in promising to hale the guilty in front of the mahogany desk. But it was as well that they should think him a little stupid. He could the more easily outwit them all. Pierre was quickly mastering his rôle of the hunted man. He turned around suddenly to surprise any possible stalkers, and did a number of clever things to hide his tracks. Furtively he entered the Institute by its back door and slipped into Father Martel's office.

"What's the matter? Is someone trailing you?"

"Sh!" said Pierre. "Not a sound! No one must know I'm here!" In low tones he quickly recounted his meeting with the Attorney-General, omitting the part that was most vivid in his memory, and concluded, "They are certainly all working together, and at this very moment the Attorney-General is informing his accomplices of my threats. I must act without being seen. For I have an extraordinary intuition that the guilty ones are in our own sheepfold. They're taking your courses, whether afternoon or evening, I don't know. I'll have to find a spot where I can observe them without being seen, and that at once, this very evening. So until I tell you the contrary, Father, your pupils are unaware that you have a secretary. No one has seen me. You understand?"

Father Martel, twirling his thumbs, listened with a tolerant smile. "What a child you are!"

"You must believe me!" Pierre cried out.

6

PIERRE was sure he was going to sneeze, but succeeded in holding himself in. He could have stationed himself in a room adjoining the small lecture hall in order to see the pupils without being seen. But such simple tactics were not in keeping with the dire plot of whose existence he had convinced himself. He had clambered up to an attic directly above the lecture hall and, crouching in loose plaster, his nose tickled by cobwebs, his mouth acrid with dust, he glued now his right eye and now his left to a crack in the ancient ceiling through which he could see the whole room below and its forty students. He raised his head, rubbed his nose, and then smiled, accepting with good grace the ridiculousness of what he was doing. If the guilty ones were beneath him, what mattered it whether they knew his face or not? And how could he identify them better from the attic than from elsewhere? Pierre answered by telling himself that it was wiser to approach the unknown by means of little tricks and mystifications than to turn one's back upon it in the name of the common sense that ignores so many horizons. You never know what you may gain from such tactics. He did not admit to himself, however, that he was vastly magnifying the dimensions of this adventure in order to hold in check the true anguish that, since his call on the Attorney-General, was threatening to overwhelm him like a heart attack.

He put his eye back to the fissure. Father Martel was knocking on the table with a long ruler and discussing profit. A few of the pupils were bald. Some, probably office employees, who most like had taken the employers' side in conflicts with the labour unions, displayed the open

mouths and earnest gaze of those who try at a ripe age to complete their education. Others, very likely working-class leaders, their chins sunk into their necks, frowningly listened with a sceptical but patient air. Perhaps they would here discover new arguments in support of future demands? Their attitude contrasted with that of two or three employers who swelled with importance and gravely nodded their agreement when Father Martel explained that the tradition of profit went back to Adam and constituted a part of mankind's basic heritage. Then there was the group of regular university students, eager to play with new ideas, who put on professional airs and took notes like experts. Almost all these men were smoking—so much so that from his observation-post Pierre could hardly make out their features. At the sight of adults sitting like young boys under a professor, a sadness surged within him and added itself to his other torments, making them all the heavier for him to bear. What empty years behind those bald heads, what a desperate effort to make up for lost time, only a score of years before they must die !

“At what point do profits become unreasonable ? ”

A “stickler,” said Pierre to himself ; that must be one of the Communists Father Martel had talked about. He looked more closely. It was a man with thick black hair, piercing eyes, and bony features. Nothing else to set him apart. A man like the others. He sat down again, giving his companion a wink—probably a second Communist. They seemed not to listen to Father Martel's explanations and kept glancing around as though they were looking for someone. Could they be searching for me ? Pierre wondered. And at once he thought how silly it was of him to relate everything to himself. For he was beginning to grow weary of his useless vigil.

The evening session was coming to an end. Thanks to the students' hubbub, Pierre was able to slip out of the

attic. He quickly brushed himself off, donned his coat, and angrily pulled his hat over his eyes. Father Martel had been quite justified in calling him a child. He moved into the hallway and mingled with the group of students who were dressing for the street while they eloquently discussed the amazing ideas that were beginning to percolate into their minds. Pierre slid along until he was immediately behind the two supposed Communists, ready to turn away instantly if they should chance to look in his direction. And suddenly his heart beat wildly. The black-haired man was saying : " Say, I didn't spot the secretary anywhere. Did you ? "

" No. Anyway, let's go on over to the Café Bleu to meet the boss. We'll talk the whole thing over."

Pierre was on the right track ! Trembling with excitement he edged over to the door and winked mysteriously at Father Martel, who had just caught sight of him. What luck ! .

He dashed toward the restaurant, where he had taken supper that very evening. Partitions with grille-work half-way up formed cubicles for each table. Might he perhaps listen without being seen ? What link was there between these two men and the Attorney-General ? The blood throbbed so hard in his temples that he saw people double and even triple. When he emerged on Palace Hill, where the Café Bleu was situated, Pierre was reassured to see the silhouettes of several customers through the plate-glass window of the restaurant, brightly illuminated by a neon sign. A number of lumberjacks in leather boots and check shirts were climbing Palace Hill with their hands in their pockets, avidly breathing the air of the city while admiring it with the wide eyes of children. The Hôtel-Dieu's grey mass hid the Laurentians and the harbour, but Pierre was reflecting neither upon his past as a logger nor upon the poetry of his town ; he was mustering all his strength in

order to enter the restaurant with a casual air, and found it far from easy.

Leaning against the door frame, a giant of sorts was holding his pipe between his lips with one hand and had a package tucked under the other arm. Pierre looked him over out of the corner of his eyes, for the sight of anyone obviously standing watch aroused his suspicions and heightened his pulse. But the man did not so much as blow puff of smoke in his direction and continued calmly to scan the horizon with the nonchalance that comes of a clear conscience. That's the way policemen wait for you ; they have the quiet manner of men who earn their livings with justice. Pierre rebuked himself severely—" Oh, come, you're overdoing it !"—and ventured into the long, narrow restaurant with its tables and benches ranged along the walls and a bar at the far end.

The barman was officiating before a host of bottles dazzlingly coloured and glittering with gold ; he officiated with as much pomp as a priest at the altar, and Pierre, annoyed, told himself that the quick addition of six candles at the right intervals between the bottles would have made the scene sacrilegious. A large wall mirror towered behind the bottles, multiplying by two this shabby restaurant, this whimsical dispensary where hard liquor stood side by side with sandwiches and ice-cream, and where most of the customers came by habit and lack of imagination. Pierre ordered a glass of beer, to give the impression of being a man with time on his hands and to avoid raising any suspicions in the barman, who had asked him what he would like.

Suddenly he set down his glass and looked fixedly into the mirror. The two individuals glimpsed at the Institute were crossing Palace Hill. They stopped for a moment at the door and took from the pipe-smoking giant the package he handled them. Pierre wet his dry lips with beer ; it

occurred to him that everyone in the restaurant was a party to the plot ; in his innocence he had walked right into a den of conspirators. But no ; all the others were eating or drinking placidly, without even glancing, at him.

What was that thin, square package ? The giant conspirator moved away without a sign, and the two " Communists " came in. After a quick glance, they chose the next to last table, which no one was tempted to take because of its nearness to the kitchen. While they removed their coats they scanned the other tables, and then sat with their backs to the mirror, casting one last look toward the door. The scenario was working out all to the advantage of Pierre—its hero and its spy. Events and circumstances were joining forces to further the success of his adventure. He slipped into the last cubicle, his face to the bar and his back to the two men, from whom he was separated by the latticed partition. Pierre heard an oath ; then one of the men said, " Phew ! The job is getting complicated. What are we going to do with that fanatical secretary ? At least we've got to get one good look at him."

The other, who seemed to be the theorist of the two, declared in a slow, steady voice, which must surely have been accompanied by the gestures of an intellectual. " It's my view that we should not worry about this young fellow. As far as we are concerned, our purpose is to put up the posters and destroy Father Martel. Our mission goes no farther. If to please this rotten bourgeois with whom we momentarily share a common aim we turn ourselves into professional thugs, we take on a part of their game which does not belong to us. At that rate they would soon be offering us jobs as detectives ! In my opinion we should interrupt the poster stunt for a while and watch what the new fellow's up to."

" All the same, he's threatened to catch us ! " The other seemed out of patience.

"Let's wait for the boss. I'm beginning to suspect that he won't like this business."

The two men interrupted their talk to examine the menu offered them by the waiter and give their orders.

"Anyway, I'm anxious to see what they've dreamt up this time, for a poster."

"You did tell me that the boss called you up this noon? He's been away for quite a while now."

"Yes, he had just gotten off the train. He'll be here any minute."

Pierre's throat was dry. He selected at random from the card the waiter was holding in front of him and ordered a whole lobster without realizing what he was doing. So someone, perhaps the Attorney-General, had ordered these men to beat him up? And obviously the two individuals were Communists? How was that possible?

"Here he is now!" the bald, cautious comrade exclaimed, straightening up and extending his hand.

Pierre at once raised his eyes to the mirror and grabbed the edge of the table in his surprise. Could he credit what he saw? Big Dick O'Riley!

Big Dick, sporting a cross-shaped plaster near his mouth. Pierre hid his face, and felt it grow cold between his hands. Amidst the three men's joyful exclamation over their reunion, he heard O'Riley say, "That, believe it or not, my friends, is the result of a Catholic punch in the jaw."

The two astonished men urged him to tell them how it had happened, but he brushed their questions aside. "Let's attend to the most pressing matters first, on the basis of what you told me over the phone. What sort of business are you up to this time? I hope it isn't anything foolish."

"This time," answered the more cheerful of the two, the man with the shock of hair, "we're working in partnership

with the Attorney-General, without his knowing it and with his protection, in order to justify your last year's accusation that we looked like two stool-pigeons."

"Donat," Big Dick parried gaily, "you know that in the great purge it was the best jokers who disappeared the first. Let's be serious at all costs. Give Joe the floor."

Joe, the bald theorist, coughed and took up the story in a voice that betrayed anxiety. "It began two months ago. Donat and I were at headquarters, preparing the lumbermen's newspaper, when we saw a grey Buick draw up at the door. A slight young fellow with a blond moustache came in, leaned on the counter jauntily, shook his cigarette ashes on the floor, and asked to see the boss. We answered, 'Everyone is boss here.' Then he said, 'That's all right, then. You are Communists, I know. I've come to do you a favour. It is to inform you that a Franciscan has recently opened in Quebec a Popular Institute of Political Sciences, the purpose of which is to make a comparative study of Marxism and democracy. I don't think you'll be happy about that. If I were you, I'd enrol in the night classes and look into the threat it may involve for you. The school is amazingly popular already. So if you are against it, as I think you will be, you'd better get busy. I also know people who have as good reasons as yours to fear this Institute and would probably be interested in joining forces with you to fight it. How about it?'

"Well, we were pretty curious by this time, and we said we'd look into it. The young chap seemed too wet around the ears for us to fear any trap. 'Then I'll be back in a week,' he said, and he winked as he went out.

"We immediately made inquiries. It was true enough. The matter called for quick action. So we enrolled at the Institute, which is operated by some sort of Franciscan fanatic—his soul may yearn for heaven, but his red hair looks more like hell. His name is Father Martel, and

seemingly, he knew some of the comrades in Germany, where he lived for several years. In a word, the dangerous type. We went to two lectures. And oh boy ! Dick, did we see the harm that might come of it ! Imagine a Marxism inspired by Hegel and stopping short with Lenin. In fact he's making us into Trotskyites. You see the point ? We're stuck with the very label we hate most, and then possible future members of the Party are attracted by what we repudiate. And the same treatment for the democratic ideology. Can you conceive a democracy inspired by Christ, taking as its text the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and putting into perfect practice the ideas of Abraham Lincoln ! The Government finds itself as naturally opposed to this teaching as we could possibly be.

" I speak of the Government, because the young man with the blond moustache came back exactly three days later and made us a little speech, after we had given him to understand that perhaps we would be ready to go along with him. He said, ' Gentlemen, my name is Yvon Letellier and I am the Attorney-General's nephew. Here is my card. My uncle is racking his brains to find a means of closing this institute, for the Premier is wholly out of patience. My uncle tried to persuade this Franciscan's superiors to withdraw him from circulation. Out of the question. The Franciscans would be only too pleased to have, like the Dominicans and the Jesuits, an established place in our higher education. And this Father Martel, who is becoming more and more popular, arouses their hopes. So I then promised my uncle that I would take care of his problem, of course without telling him that I was approaching you. If he knew it, he would probably have a stroke. • Just think ! Allying myself with Communists against a Franciscan ! But what can you expect ? He belongs to the old school and does not understand that we have a great deal to learn from the Communists. Then, top, nothing could be more in line

with Stalin's policies than such a collaboration. What do you suggest, gentlemen?'

"The idea was not stupid. From whatever point of view you looked at it, it seemed perfectly logical—a brilliant Stalinist device. So we told the youngster to come back the next day. We checked up; he had told the truth. Donat and I put our heads together, and thought of caricatures posted where they would do the most good. The experience of the Party has shown that there's no better way of destroying a man who has little to back him up, even a Franciscan.

"The young fellow returned the next day. We told him of our idea. He was enthusiastic. 'The police will be most tolerant,' he said. 'As far as they are concerned, you will be ghosts. They will see nothing. I'll undertake to find an artist to prepare the posters, and I'll inform my uncle that I've found reliable men to distribute them, so that I can stay clear of the whole thing.' Then he left, and told us to wait until we heard from him. Two days later he called, asked us to come to this restaurant, and turned over to us the first set of posters. They showed Father Martel as a sort of devil holding out the hammer and sickle for workmen with the features of Stalin to kiss. As a caricature it was very well done, and we saw no objection to it. It seems that these drawings are done by a professor of the School of Fine Arts, whose great ambition is to be its director. In short, the first posters were most effective. Gales of laughter from the University—where, evidently, there is no great fondness for Father Martel's gyrations—and screams of rage from the Franciscan. He at once demanded an investigation by the police, which was duly made but yielded nothing. Young Letellier had not deceived us. We then agreed that the posters should be delivered to us at the door of this restaurant by one of the Department's confidential agents."

"Very interesting, but I'm none too happy about it," said O'Riley. "It's a bit childish. It's dilettantism and a

waste of time. I've learnt that lesson at my own expense. If the Government has enemies in common with us, let the Government take care of them—they will be in good hands, and we must attend to our more pressing problems."

"I was saying the same thing to Donat only a few moments ago," the theorist hastily added. "I would like to see the scheme abandoned. The more so because young Letellier came to see us this afternoon; he was in quite a state. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'a serious difficulty has arisen. Father Martel has engaged a secretary, a queer fellow who has promised the Attorney-General he will patrol the streets, catch you red-handed, and bring you as prisoners into my uncle's own private office. I know this young man; he's a contemptible but dangerous character. We'll have to see that he gets a beating, a lesson he'll never forget.'"

Pierre could not remember ever having lived through such exciting minutes. His adventure was assuming proportions that threatened to be too much for him, and might get him into a real pickle; he was listening so attentively that there was no room left in his brain for any plans of his own.

"You'll give this whole scheme up at once!" Big Dick ordered. "Do you know this young man?"

"Unfortunately we've not yet seen him," Donat shamefacedly explained. "His name doesn't mean much—Pierre Boisjoly!"

"Pierre Boisjoly, you say!" growled the Irishman, holding his voice under control by an effort and half-rising from his seat. "Tall? Curly brown hair, and a heavy tan?"

"That's the description we have," both men mumbled.

"Hell!" said O'Riley. He sank back heavily, his left arm hanging loose over the bench.

Pierre, his eyes staring, seemed glued to the back of his

seat. His heart was beating so hard that its thumping must have been audible as far as the next table.

"What's the matter?" Donat and Joe were now consumed by curiosity.

"He's the fellow who punched me in the jaw, broke the strike in the Savard camps, and destroyed all the organizing work I'd done. Yes, indeed, we'll rough him up, because we've a few accounts to settle with him ourselves."

The Irishman began telling the story of the strike. Far from being frightened, Pierre listened with delight, and one thought wandered deliciously through his mind: "Lord, how important I am!"

When the story was finished, exclamations of "Incredible! Unbelievable!" from the Communists were muffled in the glasses they simultaneously raised to their lips. Suddenly one of these glasses was violently slammed back on the table, and Donat cried, "Joe, isn't that our young blond friend coming in the door?"

"It is, indeed."

Pierre glanced eagerly at the mirror. It was Yvon Letellier. How sure of himself he looked. Would their paths always cross like this?

"Gentlemen," Yvon Letellier was whispering, out of breath, "forgive me for bothering you, but I had something more to tell you about Pierre Boisjoly. I know him all too well, and hope you'll give him a good going-over. I've a powerful grudge against him."

"Sit down, then, and tell us what you know about him," said the Irishman.

"You can talk freely, young fellow, this is Dick O'Riley, the boss."

In quick, well-turned phrases Yvon Letellier related how Pierre Boisjoly had feigned a religious vocation in order to inveigle Father Loupret into paying for his studies; he described the trickery to which Pierre had, according to

him, resorted in order to win top place in his class. Pierre boiled with indignation. When Yvon proudly told about the day of the prize-giving, when his mother had unmasked this arrant hypocrite, Pierre started from his seat and in the nick of time stopped himself from dashing to the other table and crying, "Big Dick, it's not true!" Was not the idea that the Irishman believed him to be a dirty strike-breaker painful enough, without Big Dick's also becoming convinced that Pierre Boisjoly was utterly vile?

But Big Dick coldly interrupted Yvo Letellier. "That's enough, young man; you're making this Boisjoly seem more and more sympathetic to us. And it bores me. I know him well myself. I am Irish and Communist, and I know what I'm about; let's skip it."

Pierre smiled. Good old O'Riley! Yvon Letellier, taken aback, had quickly changed the subject while ordering a round of beer. With the fluency and self-possession of a law student who has a brilliant future ahead of him through his family connections, he described the unforgettable hour when the idea had struck him of uniting in a brilliant paradox the efforts of the Communists and the Attorney-General toward a common end. "Gentlemen, to your health and to the good drubbing you're going to dish out to Pierre Boisjoly!"

"We're going to dish out, you mean. Because you're coming with us. It was high time I got back to town. You also are going to have to take a few chances."

"But, Gentlemen, I can't—my exams——" Yvon stammered

"You're coming. You've shown your hand. Otherwise I'll call your uncle and let him know what's going on."

A silence followed, during which the three Communists must have watched Yvon Letellier with some amusement. He had stopped arguing. "Well, if you think——"

"Yes, I think," said the Irishman, cutting him short.

"Be here at eleven to-morrow evening. The four of us will then proceed to the Institute. And it will be your job to tack the first poster to the Institute door. We'll see if you are as brave as you are tricky, and which of you will be the trickier, you or Boisjoly, for I am certain he will be there. All set?"

"I'll be there, and I'll put up the poster!" said Yvon Letellier in a troubled voice. "But we will beat him up, won't we?"

"Of course we'll beat him up," said Big Dick, and a scornful little laugh rippled in his throat. "Now, let's go to bed."

His eyes glued to the mirror, Pierre saw them leave, Yvon Letellier trailing slowly and hesitantly behind them.

They had not seen him. So Yvon Letellier himself was going to stick the first poster! This Big Dick was quite a fellow. Pierre's imagination twisted round, bewildered, probing this new development for an extraordinary weapon he felt it offered but which he somehow could not grasp. Obviously his promise to the Attorney-General to take them prisoner and bring them before the mahogany desk was silly. And yet Big Dick, against all likelihood, hoped that Pierre would hurl himself upon the four of them. Pierre smiled and regretted anew the blow he had given O'Riley. What an Irishman! Suddenly he sat up, his face beaming, and struck his forehead. "Good Lord, I have it! I have it! It's made to order! Father Voltaire!"

"Voltaire?" asked the waiter. "And the lobster? Aren't you going to eat it?"

"Wonderful! Marvellous! . . . Your lobster? No, thanks."

Feverishly he paid his bill and left the restaurant excitedly repeating, "Wonderful!"

It was almost eleven o'clock the next evening, the hour

when the three Communists and Yvon Letellier were to provoke Pierre into attacking them in front of the very Institute itself. The Latin Quarter was drowsing quietly, muffled in a grey opacity which the pale moon could not pierce. Here and there a door opened stealthily; the occasional pedestrian walked along the centre of the icy street as though on a tightrope; icicles dropped from the gutters; then all reverted to the dead calm of a photographer's dark-room. Pierre crouched behind the basement door of the Institute, scanned the street, his eye close to a crack between two of its planks. His teeth were chattering and he shivered with excitement. This adventure stirred him so deeply that he had scarcely eaten a bite all day and had spent hours revolving his plan in his mind. He moved his face from the door and raised to the level of his eyes a camera topped with a flash-bulb.

"Be sure the bulb is screwed in tight and that you don't shake when you release the shutter!" Father Lippé had warned him. That same morning Pierre had journeyed in a taxi to the sanatorium and had told the priest of his discovery, begging him to lend him this special equipment, which was of the kind used by newspaper photographers. Enthusiastic, happy to be acting like a free man again, Father Lippé had spent an hour lavishing advice on Pierre; and then, to his delight, it had occurred to him that his own room here was the perfect spot in which to develop the negative and make the prints without fear of detection. What Communist, what police officer, would ever imagine that such a negative would be hidden in Father "Voltaire's" quarters? And what a weapon—a negative showing Yvon Letellier posting a caricature under the eyes of three Communist accomplices! The Attorney-General would be beside himself, and the safety of the Institute would be assured. How silly they were, thought Pierre, to imagine he was quixotic enough to attack four men all at once!

This master-stroke would raise Pierre from the obscurity of youth and plunge him at once into decisive combat with the great powers that ruled the Province. And, above all, he reflected, such a weapon would surely enable him to defend himself against the Attorney-General if ever the circumstances of the old lady's death should come to light. That Denis Boucher was a bit light-headed; perhaps he might not always keep the secret. Pierre heard a slight sound and hastily put his eye to the crack. No one. Again he checked over his plan. He was about ten feet away from the front door of the Institute. The area door behind which he was hiding was slightly ajar, making it possible for him to open it noiselessly, dash out, surprise them, photograph them, take advantage of their confusion, close the door behind him, shoot the bolt, run to the far end of the court, climb on to a shed—the ladder stood ready—drop into the neighbouring street, and thus elude pursuit completely. His limbs were trembling, and he reproved himself. "I must not tremble!" All day he had not gone near the Institute or his room. Father Martel knew nothing. Father Martel seemed a bit unsure of Pierre's ability. Well, he'd soon see.

Abruptly Pierre's hands tightened on the camera. His blood froze in his veins. Those hesitant muffled steps, the whispering! They were here!—Big Dick O'Riley was whistling, and Yvon Letellier, bare-headed, was glancing nervously about him. "I don't think he'll show up!" Yvon murmured with a certain satisfaction, for he was beginning to be afraid that this Irishman with the sarcastic tongue might leave him alone to grapple with Pierre. The bald comrade had the bundle of caricatures under his arm.

Big Dick peered around and then nodded. "We might at least have let him know what time we were coming. Perhaps we shan't even see him. Young man, you're lucky! Anyhow, let's enjoy this great moment and watch the

Attorney-General's nephew putting up a poster. What a fine paradox, eh? Hand him one, Joe."

Pierre, his body taut, was slowly raising his camera and preparing to shove the door open with his shoulder. The three Communists were backing down the street and laughing at Yvon Letellier, who, trying to hide his panic, addressed them in hollow yet flippant tones: "Gentleman, you're cheating. Stay near me or I quit. I'm no boxer. You never know; he might pop out any time."

The three men came close to him, laughing heartily.

"What's more," Yvon protested, "I'd rather post this on the telephone pole than on the door. It will attract more attention that way."

"Go on, put it up!" Big Dick was losing his patience.

Just as Yvon Letellier, his trembling hands outstretched, was taking up the poster, they heard a sharp "Hey!" and a shadow sprang from the area door. The four men turned abruptly, only to be blinded by the flash-bulb. The few seconds during which surprise held them captive allowed Pierre—whom they had clearly seen—to disappear and push home the bolt on the door.

"Hell!" bellowed O'Riley. And he charged against the door, which gave way under the impact of his powerful shoulder. He glimpsed Pierre's outline on the shed roof and saw him disappear into the night. "We've got to catch him," Big Dick roared. "Donat and Joe, run around the block; I'll follow him through here."

Pale with fright, his forehead dropping wet, Yvon Letellier remained alone in the middle of the street, gradually growing aware of the gravity of the situation and glimpsing the disastrous consequences for his own future which might result from his blundering and his hatred of Pierre Boisjoly.

THE next morning at nine Pierre was pacing up and down Father Lippé's room, glancing stealthily from time to time at the window. Despite all his precautions, did they perhaps know that he was here? The police and the Communists have ways beyond our imagining for ferreting out the people they are after. Father Lippé was spending an awfully long time in that lavatory he used as a dark-room. As long as the photo turned out well! His distress inspired in Pierre a fresh suspicion. The jittery police might question the Superior of the Grand Seminary, learn that Father Lippé had been banished because of the Institute, unearth someone who would remember the friendship between him and Pierre, and reach a brilliant conclusion. Squads of police would be rushing here at any moment. Then again, maybe they would skilfully question Father Martel and learn that Pierre had come to the Institute via old Savard, the sanatorium, and Father Lippé. There could be no doubt of it; he was on the point of being tracked down. Again he ran to the window and scrutinized everything in sight. Nothing out of the ordinary. Yet the alarm would soon be given. He must act quickly, possess himself of that precious photograph, and hide the negative. Thus armed, he could confront them.

Pierre had good reason to be nervous. The night before, in mid-flight, he had seen that he was cornered by Big Dick and his associates, who were covering both ends of the street through which he was to make his escape. Having spotted them before they saw him, he flopped down in a mound of snow piled just inside an area entrance, and was within earshot when Big Dick, rejoining his crestfallen companions,

said in a voice full of menace : " We've got to lay hands on that photo, no matter how. The first thing to do is let the Attorney-General know. He'll put his police on the job. He needs that negative just as badly as we do. And if they don't succeed, look out for Pierre Boisjoly ! "

Holding his breath, his heart beating wildly, he had heard them debating ; finally they decided to wait for him at his room—for evidently they had been cunning enough to get his address from Father Martel by telephone. When Pierre was sure that they had been gone for a good ten minutes, he decided to hide out in the small hotel where Willie Savard had gone on his debauch the night before last.

On the alert for the least sound, he had not slept a wink ; then, when day came, he had rushed to the sanatorium. Father Lippé had slept no more than he. He snatched the camera from Pierre's hands, whispering, " Did you succeed ? "

Pierre had described to him the alarming turn of events. Obviously, it was now a matter of life and death. But Father Lippé's only remark had been : " This is the first time in my life I've been really on edge. Oh ! If only you got a good shot ! "

" Eureka ! " The outcry made Pierre jump, and froze the blood in his veins. Father Lippé, wrapped in a white apron, his glasses half-way down his nose, and his face wreathed in smiles, emerged from the lavatory bearing in his two outstretched hands the precious photograph, still dripping wet. He placed it on the bureau on front of the window. " It's a masterpiece ! " he murmured, in a voice tremulous with delight.

Pierre was speechless. Appalled, yet beside himself with joy, he saw all his hopes and fears exceeded by the amazing reality of this photograph. Everything in it was beautifully clear, even the blackness of the background. All four of the men had turned to face the unexpected photographer.

and their faces were vivid, with amazement. Big Dick's features and his towering height, and Yvon Letellier with outstretched arms, tacking the caricature to the post, stood out in especially striking relief. And the caricature itself, drawn in heavy lines of Indian ink, came out as clearly on the glazed paper as though it had been pasted there. The cartoon represented Stalin, dressed as the Pope and holding out a hammer for the kneeling Father Martel to kiss.

"What a damning piece of evidence!" Pierre muttered.

"You know, Pierre, I've just reached a wonderful conclusion," Father Lippé remarked, suddenly thoughtful as he studied Stalin in papal garb. "Anti-clericals are dull people, and the only thing that stimulates their imagination is the sight of a cassock. Christianity and Hellenism are the two great reservoirs of the creative spirit."

These words did not penetrate Pierre's mind; he was living far too intensely to waste time on such reflections.

"True enough," he said nervously. "Now the job is to find a place where I can hide the negative. Certainly not here or in my room or on my person. This negative will save the Institute, and me, and you. Oh Lord, where? There are millions of places where I could hide it, and I can't think of a single one. And it must be done quickly."

There was a knock at the door. Pierre tossed his hat over the picture while Father Lippé went to answer. It was merely the bounding, grimacing drug addict, Monsieur Paul, who kept knitting frantically while he delivered his message. "I told Monsieur Savard that you were here. He would like to see you."

"I haven't time!" said Pierre impatiently. But a sudden inspiration made him change his mind. "Oh, wait. Tell him I'll be there in five minutes."

When the door had closed behind the poor little man, Pierre, full of his new idea, gave free rein to his enthusiasm. "I'm going to entrust that negative to Monsieur Savard."

I'm sure he's the most reliable person available. Even when he's drunk, he never says more than he wants to say, and puts on a magnificent act. I have faith in him. Give me the negative. And while I'm gone, wrap the print up carefully. "What a business!"

Father Lippé, who had been as excited as Pierre until the print was made, no longer felt himself attuned to this more and more feverish anxiety. Used to the slow pace and the peaceful commonplaces of ecclesiastical life, he now received Pierre's instructions with an amused smile, ill persuaded that this drama had the proportions Pierre attributed to it.

Pierre put the negative into an envelope, slipped it under his jacket, and went along to Willie Savard's room. Clad in a dressing-gown, that gentleman was calmly smoking his pipe in a chair near the window. His huge face, rosy and tranquil, reflected the boredom of an active man forced to remain idle. He immediately began to talk.

"Hello, young man! I asked you to come, first of all to thank you and then to beg your forgiveness for having tried to strangle you. But most of all I wanted to get a better look at the fellow who cost me five thousand dollars."

"Four thousand five hundred," Pierre corrected him.

"Right. While I was drunk you made a good impression on me. I want to see if I feel the same way when I'm sober."

"Monsieur Savard, I . . ."

"Do you want to be my secretary?"

"Can't you think of anything else? Monsieur Savard, I . . ."

Willie Savard began laughing, and looked at Pierre with intense interest. "You talk to me as though I were still drunk. It is at such times that people are frank with me. You interest me tremendously. I want you as my secretary because you have guts. You please me."

Pierre amiably accepted the compliment, and then pulled out the negative. "Will you do me a great service?" he

asked gravely. "It's almost a matter of life and death, for me."

Nonplussed, Willie Savard laid his pipe on the arm of his chair. "Yes. How much? I like lending to your sort. The more you lend them, the better you hold them."

Under any other circumstance, that threat alone would have made Pierre leave the room without further ado. But the police or the Communists might appear upon the scene at any moment, and the Institute must be saved.

"Not a cent, Monsieur Savard. Would you keep this envelope for me? It contains the negative of a photograph which would mean nothing to you. To me it's worth a fortune. There are people who would be willing to kill me to lay hands on it; but as long as I have it in my possession I can come out on top in a struggle that involves my whole future. Promise me not to say a word about it to anyone."

"All right. Give it to me. I'll put it in my safe." He asked no questions, and slipped the sealed envelope inside his dressing-gown. "And don't forget," he said, "if someone tries to harm you he'll be up against Willie Savard, who can do things when he wants to. Run along, and don't worry."

Pierre felt his eyes grow misty. He walked quickly to the door. But before going out he turned, impulsively, "Yesterday I bought roses for your wife," he said, "because she called me a tramp the other evening. But I didn't have the courage to take them to her. I threw them into a trash-can."

Monsieur Savard, choked with a strange emotion, rubbed a trembling hand over his hairy chest and thought to himself that Pierre was the son he would have liked to have.

Little did Pierre realize to what extent all his emotional

and intellectual faculties, stimulated by his state of alarm, obeyed the requirements of his perilous situation. With Willie Savard he had assumed exactly the right attitudes—a touch of arrogance, followed by tenderness. And they had done the trick; the negative was in safe hands. No sooner had Pierre left the old man's room than his mind was racing toward the next hurdle it must clear—the problem of how to leave the sanatorium, and with the photograph on his person, reach the Institute without being attacked and captured by the numerous hunters who must be combing the streets of the city. Naturally the patrols would be thickest along the approaches to the Institute, to prevent his making contact with Father Martel. How about telephoning? Steps would have been taken to intercept any conversation. Should he go directly to the Attorney-General's office, to forestall further action? Certainly. But first he must see Father Martel, tell him who his enemies were, and inform him of the trumps he held in the game—for if anything happened to Pierre, how would that good priest know how to defend himself? Common sense quickly forced an answer to that question: Father Lippé would certainly see to it that the Franciscan learned all the details. But the young man did not care to rely on this, because it was not really for reasons of tactics and safety that he wanted to see Father Martel, but rather to savour his astonishment and admiration when he learned that his secretary had accomplished something of which the priest had judged him incapable.

Just as he re-entered Father Lippé's room, the idea for which he had been racking his brains burst full upon him and made his voice quiver with enthusiasm. "Father, would you have an old cassock? Then lend it to me."

He explained to Father Lippé, who was a trifle dubious, that if he were thus clothed as a priest, if his eyes were hidden by sun-glasses, and if his head were covered with a

broad-brimmed felt hat, he would escape the attention of his pursuers and could get to Father Martel safely. Father Lippé frowned.

"But they'll see you leaving here in that get-up. What will the patients and Mother Cecilia say?"

"I've thought of all that," Pierre went on excitedly. "I'll roll the cassock up to my waist under my overcoat, and the moment I'm out of sight of the sanatorium I'll let it down. And please lend me your black hat as well. I'll buy dark glasses at the first drug store."

Father Lippé went to his closet, but before unhooking the cassock he glanced sideways at Pierre and sighed. "Heaven help us! There's no getting away from it, this clinic is beginning to derange our minds."

Pierre left the drug store and immediately put on his sunglasses. His breathing was irregular, but he was becoming used to the rapid beating of his heart. He could not resist the temptation to stop in front of the shop window and take a look at himself dressed as a priest. The silhouette reflected by the thick glass did not make him smile. It even aroused in him a sudden and growing emotion, for it was the same silhouette as had haunted him throughout his adolescence. This cassock dragging at his heels made him suddenly and completely forget the problems that confronted him; he was plunged into the reality, when all he had intended to borrow was the appearance. A sort of dizziness overcame him. "How happy a pure-hearted man must be, dressed like this," he thought. Nervously he shook his head as though to drive out a strange feeling of shame, a feeling of playing the impostor in the realm of his first ideal. Now the cassock weighed him down, smothered him. He would have to get quickly through what he had planned, and return this fancy-dress costume to Father Lippé as soon as possible.

He boarded a bus that was going to the Latin Quarter.

Then he clapped his hand to his forehead. "Good Lord," he thought, "I forgot to tell Monsieur Savard to turn that negative over to Father Martel if I should disappear!" But in a moment he had forgotten this fresh worry, for an elderly gentleman was offering him his seat. Blushing, Pierre refused. The people in the bus had reassuring faces, not on the lookout for anything in particular. Of course, all his enemies must be concentrating their search on the obvious places—his room, his mother's apartment, the Institute, the sanatorium.

He left the bus at Fabrique Hill, two blocks from the Institute, and again scrutinized his appearance in a shop window. How could anyone suspect him of being Pierre Boisjoly? Nervously he fingered his inside pocket, felt the photograph, adjusted his overcoat collar, and assumed the quiet pace he had so often observed as characteristic of young priests.

Far fewer detectives or Communists than he had imagined were on guard duty. In this Latin Quarter, buzzing with activity by day, he could not distinguish a single suspect figure. His clerical gait was easy to feign, and soon he was willing to meet anyone except another young priest who might ask him his name. An ambulance rushed by him, its siren screaming. "Who on earth has time to be sick to-day," he wondered, as he rounded the corner at the same time as the ambulance. But before he could think of an answer he saw the vehicle stop in front of the Institute, where a number of persons were bustling around the front door. Forgetting his cassock, he started to run, and mingled with a group of idlers who were exchanging solemn opinions and peering in through the window. "I'll bet he's dead!" said one. "Cartoons like that are enough to kill any priest!" agreed another. "It seems it's been going on for weeks and the police have not yet arrested those responsible. There's something back of it all."

Limp with grief, Pierre was able, thanks to his cassock, to get into the building, which was swarming with inquisitive people. He saw Father Martel, inert, stretched on the couch in his office. The thick red beard lent a strange aspect to that lifeless head. A doctor was listening for the heart-beat with a stethoscope. He straightened, slowly folded his instrument, and said to the stretcher-bearers, "No use, gentlemen, it's all over."

As he said these words the doctor cast a long glance at the caricature which had been torn to bits by Father Martel in a fatal attack of rage. The young Franciscan who had assisted Father Martel in his teaching knelt, his eyes filled with tears, and began the prayers for the dead. Everyone dropped to his knees, and Pierre slipped out of the room. The whole business continued to seem like a dream. He would leave this house and the dream would go on, more complex, more tragic, for Pierre carried in his pocket the proof that Father Martel had been indirectly killed by Yvon Letellier and Big Dick.

They, too, had had a share in killing someone, and from this his heart gained a certain comfort.

As he went out warily into the street, the chill thought seized him: "The Institute no longer exists. What will become of me?" Then dread really froze him. No longer could he creep out by the back door and make himself a new path into oblivion. He would be hunted everywhere, they would try to obliterate him, for he possessed proof of a crime which involved the reputation of an influential family. Only one thought ran through his head: "Go to the Attorney-General before you're caught. That is your only refuge." Stricken with fright, he scanned his surroundings with the bewilderment of a hunted animal. Ever since he had seen the ambulance, he had forgotten that men were searching for him. Some of those on his trail must surely have been among the idlers at the Institute, but thanks to

his disguise he had not been recognized. He hailed a taxi and had himself driven to the Parliament buildings. He must act quickly, pounce on the enemy, forestall his attack.

He rushed into the corridor and heaved a sigh of relief at finding himself in the Attorney-General's ante-room. No one had yet laid him low with a shot in the back.

"Father?" asked the crippled doorman.

"Please say Father Pierre Boisjoly is here!" he said breathlessly.

It was the Attorney-General himself who opened the door, as though he wanted to break it down. His blue eyes protruded from his large smooth face, which had turned waxen with amazement. Pierre took off his sun-glasses and entered the office of the Attorney-General without the latter's having uttered a word.

8

THE stress of these experiences had dimmed Pierre's eyesight, and everything he saw was fogged over, as in a spoiled photograph. Amidst the grey, shimmering mass of furniture and windows, the crumpled form of a young man caught his attention. Could that sobbing figure with its head buried in its hands be Yvon Letellier?

"As for you, get out of here, you idiot!" cried the Attorney-General.

Yvon cast a long, beseeching look at Pierre as he left, and Pierre turned his head away. There followed a painful silence until the door closed with a muffled thud. On either side of the long mahogany desk, the two men stood as if weighing their distress and trying to strike a balance. Then the Attorney-General walked round the desk and came to stare at the skirt of Pierre's cassock.

"A disguise which serves as well as another," said Pierre curtly, his tone very dry, as though he were a real priest and the other an anti-clerical.

Anger stained the older man's face purple, a purple almost matching the bluish glint of his white moustache. He tried to speak ironically. "I'll wager you'd like to slap me in the face!"

Pierre was exerting so much effort to maintain his poise, his body and his will were drawn so taut, that he could hardly breathe. The restrained wrath of this powerful official almost pierced his armour and he spoke in a weakened voice.

"Don't be angry. It will do no good. Didn't you give me permission to discover the guilty persons and bring them

here? You took me literally, thinking I was a stupid, childish braggart; and you even told me to use a truck. Well, I have caught the miscreants, as you know."

"And you've come to rub it in?" exclaimed the Attorney-General.

Again Pierre's eyes misted over. His whole being seemed to be engulfed in fury, against whose power he felt himself small and blind. Such would be his struggle when finally death confronted him. "If that's the way you want to put it," he managed to reply. "I am ashamed for you, because of what you have allowed to happen to Father Martel; and I am ashamed for your nephew."

With these last words his voice grew firm, and he felt the solemn presence of the cassock that trailed over his feet. Breathlessly he watched the Attorney-General, who was beside himself and was edging around the desk, leaning on his splayed fingers as though they fruitlessly sought imaginary push-buttons with which to summon aid.

"Oh! So you want to play that game, my boy?" he growled.

"Wait a moment!" Pierre interjected. He thrust his hand into his pocket for the photograph. His fingers were shaking.

The Attorney-General, his eyes bulging, his chest wracked with asthmatic coughing, stood for a moment transfixed, his fingers still pressing the desk and his lips parted like an exhausted boxer's. The telephone jangled. He dully studied the instrument and then lifted it to his ear. At the first words he heard, he fell back into his leather swivel-chair as though someone had struck him a blow—that chair where normally he sat enthroned in solemn amiability.

"Dead! Dead!" he whispered, grey with fright.

For a moment Pierre thought the Honourable Minister would collapse from a heart attack, like Father Martel.

His nostrils were pinched and his free hand sought automatically to loosen the knot of his tie. Then he succeeded in mastering his faintness, and began to speak.

"Take care of the newspapers immediately. If the news leaks out that there is a connection between the priest's death and the caricatures, say that the Department will seek and punish the guilty without mercy. But see that it doesn't leak out. Act quickly."

A feeling that he was lost began to creep over Pierre. The Attorney-General had abruptly hung up, and his features were struggling to regain their composure. Pierre interpreted the stare he felt focused on him as, "How can I rid myself of this damned nuisance?" He parried the look, and made a quick thrust. "Yes, he is dead! And you are to blame."

"He had heart disease," said the Attorney-General, hiding his trembling hands under the desk. Pierre laid the photograph in front of him.

The older man looked at it, but only briefly, as though to defend himself from a problem that was again threatening to overcome him. Until that moment he had hoped that the photograph was a failure, and that there would remain only Pierre's oral testimony. In that case there was nothing to fear. But here was the photograph, almost alive, showing the Attorney-General's nephew posing one of the caricatures, while three Communists watched him. What a scandal for the family, were this photograph to get to the public! What a blow to the Party! His own career would be finished! He took a deep breath and began pacing back and forth across the vast room.

"How much?"

"It's not for sale!" Pierre burst out, in a cry of joy. Of a sudden he was dizzy with delight. The Attorney-General was at his mercy. Now Pierre could charge into the fray with knightly arms that would spare this victim but

prudently keep him as a hostage. Complaining of the heat, the young man slipped off his overcoat.

Letellier was regaining his composure. Folding his arms, he watched his adversary closely. The simplicity of this youth, his boldness, his mettle, and his intelligence made him redoubtable. He would not have come straight to this office if he had not had some bargain in mind.

"Well, then! Tell me what you want."

"I want only one thing—not to be attacked; to be left in peace. The Communists have vowed to get me if you do not succeed. Tell them to give up any such notion. The negative is in good hands, and I am keeping it to defend myself, not to attack. You can understand my taking this precaution. But I am no blackmailer. Come, sir, don't worry. I shan't try to get even with your nephew, however much he may deserve it."

The Attorney-General drew close to him and examined his features with curiosity. Pierre looked straight at his adversary, his eyes frank and candid. Then the other smiled with relief and gave him a cordial pat on the shoulder.

"You are a straightforward fellow, and you please me. With your look of a shy child and your practical sense of moral values, you will lead people by the nose and they will like you in spite of it. On my nephew's behalf, on my own, and on that of the Government, I thank you."

The Attorney-General's phrases were beginning to take on the tone of an election speech. "He's going to offer me a decoration!" thought Pierre, in a sudden access of timidity.

Letellier was rapidly adapting himself to the circumstances. That negative was somewhere in safe-keeping, and would hang over him like a sword of Damocles. He realized that he must without fail attach this pure knight to himself and keep a tight eye on him, until some day or

other he could compromise him so deeply that he would no longer dare think of using the famous negative and would even be forced to hand it over.

"Young man," continued the Attorney-General, placing both hands upon his shoulders, "I need a man of your calibre as secretary. Are you interested?"

It was now Pierre's turn to stare, so great was his surprise. It was a regular epidemic: everyone wanted him to be his secretary. Letellier, dazzled by his own idea, straightened his shoulders with the quiet pride of those who rejoice in their good deeds. "Come on! Say yes!" he exclaimed heartily, tapping Pierre again upon the shoulder. "If you agree, I'll give you free time to take your law course. You see, I am a much more decent fellow than you thought. And I'm offering you an extraordinary opportunity. I'm giving you a key to the kingdom; you will be near the leader of your Province and you will walk at his side in his palace, because you will be engaged on his most secret and most important business."

"Yes, I accept," Pierre replied dreamily, for he was so overcome with astonishment that he was wholly unable to guess at the Attorney-General's strategy. In this unexpected development, he saw only a guarantee of his own safety.

"Wonderful!" Letellier exclaimed triumphantly. He opened a drawer and extracted a box of cigars.

"No, thanks," said Pierre, toying absently with the buttons of his cassock. "I accept on one trifling condition. Presumably because of the sympathy which one of my clerical friends showed for the Institute, the Seminary authorities have banished him to the chaplaincy of a clinic for the deranged. Surely you can have him transferred once more and restored to his Seminary professorship?"

"Nothing easier, my lad! Father Lippé? You see, we know everything here. It will be done to-morrow."

"You mean it?" Pierre asked, with the smile of an incredulous child.

"I swear it! And have no more worries about the Communists. I have means to force them to stay quiet."

And the Attorney-General drew a satisfied puff from his long cigar, which jutted jovially beneath his white moustache. Pierre, moved at the thought that he was keeping his promise of having Father Lippé set free from the sanatorium, stepped over toward the broad window overlooking the park in front of the Parliament buildings. A tear wet his lashes. The city stirred all round this hub of Government, and he, Pierre Boisjoly, had just placed his foot in the stirrup of Power. The prophecy Father Lippé had made, on that amazing evening when he had given up his religious vocation, continued to come true. "Go, new Rastignac, Quebec is yours. You will conquer and then, after your triumph, you will be unhappy and you will hear the call of the real Minotaur."

Slowly Pierre unbuttoned his cassock, took it off, and carefully folded it under his arm. He turned to face the Attorney-General. "I am ready," he said.

PART III

1

It was ten o'clock in the morning and Pierre, hands in pockets, was standing at the window of his office in the Parliament buildings, looking absent-mindedly among the branches for the finch whose enraptured warblings caressed the air. Was it possible that he had had his job only for a week and already his life had turned humdrum? However important you may think a post is before you get it, he reflected, you're soon surfeited, once you have it, with the prestige it promised, and you begin to be absorbed into the routine. During the six days he had been there, he had felt his recent feverishness die down a little more each morning, and the pulse of his anguish slacken. The Attorney-General, whose office was next door to his own, had treated him with fatherly kindness, the Government employees had greeted him with respect, and the young girls in the Department had addressed him in such tones and with such smiles that he blushed to think of it. Flowery avenues of material advantage suddenly extended before him, as though he were some young man destined to an easy life rather than Pierre Boisjoly, upon whose conscience at the age of twenty there already weighed an abandoned vocation, the lasting unhappiness of gallant Father Loupret, and the death of an old woman. Here he was, calmly occupying this position, as though he did not owe it to blackmail.

The finch stopped singing, and now only the smell of spring and the sounds of the Grande Allée invaded the room. Frowning Pierre turned toward the green baize door through which he could enter his employer's office.

The Attorney-General had not said another word to him about the negative. Could this man really be so little concerned—a man administering the judicial machinery of a whole province, a man who thought of everything, foresaw the manoeuvres of his political enemies, acted and lived only in terms of his career? With the explanation that he was breaking Pierre in, he had been giving him the files of adjudicated and unimportant cases to study. “He’s treating me like a dangerous guest,” thought Pierre.

He reflected on the promise he had made to himself to fight all these people, each so important in his own sphere. He sadly pursed his lips. Now that he possessed the weapon that would have permitted him to engage in this combat, he scorned it to such a degree that he was even ashamed to use it as a shield. And how lonely he felt, thus armed and feared, when he was built only for love and devotion. He shrugged with impatience. He owed it to himself to rediscover, and as quickly as he could, that thirst for the infinite which had always driven him on, always eager and always betrayed. He must bring this breathing-spell to an end! But where to go? Once again the millstone of anguish was weighing upon his heart, and there were no adventures now to make him forget it.

The ringing of the telephone interrupted his day-dream. It was Father Lippé’s slow and well-modulated voice. “Hello, dear potentate of this world. You have kept your promise. We have been snatched away from the insane, we have been reinstated in our functions, and in our old quarters at the Seminary. All about us bloom envious smiles. We plan to take more photographs than ever, since photography is not only an art but also a powerful weapon. Isn’t it?”

A childish smile illuminated Pierre’s face. “So you’re happy?”

“Never ask a priest such a question. Have you still to

learn that we cannot be unhappy? Oh, these puerile questions! But it is only very rarely that I am wild with joy, as at present. And how is the dear Attorney-General?"

"Extremely pleasant. It's surprising. He hasn't said another word."

Suddenly Pierre contracted his brows and held the instrument away from his ear to look at it. What was that intermittent crackling, mingled with the voices? Was someone else listening to the conversation? But Father Lippé kept on with priestly unconcern.

"I give you a year to supplant the Attorney-General himself. Then I shall become Rector of the University and we shall have Rome award a medal *Bene Merenti* to dear Willie Savard, who keeps our precious negative so safe out of harm's way."

"Dear Father, don't say such things on the phone!" Pierre's voice was shrill with alarm.

"How nervous you are, *carissime Petre*! You don't do enough calisthenics. Think of the Greeks, who never had any nerves. But what on earth is the matter?"

"I'm afraid someone's listening to us. I'll come and explain. Good-bye for now."

Pierre hung up nervously, and did not hear Father Lippé's flabbergasted "Oh!" He glanced around him. Had this conversation been recorded? Probably not. He was worrying over nothing. Inactivity was making him imagine that there were spies in every corner. Up to now, no one seemed to have been paying undue attention to him.

The buzzer sounded. Pierre went hesitantly to the green baize door and slowly opened it. Comfortably leaning back in his swivel chair and smoking a cigar, the Attorney-General greeted him with a cordially outstretched arm.

"My dear Boisjoly, I have good news for you. Here!"

Pierre, his heart mistrustful and his nerves on edge, cast a

searching glance at this genial-seeming man. Then, yielding to curiosity, he read the out-sized card that was handed to him :

"Madame Huguette Letellier requests the pleasure of your company at a cocktail party. . . ."

Catching his breath, Pierre sat down on the edge of the arm-chair and slowly rubbed his hand over his head as though he had received a blow. Before he could get over his surprise, he heard the Attorney-General remark in a friendly tone, "Yes, indeed ; we Letelliers are like that. I've convinced my sister-in-law and my nephew of the wrong they have done you. That is their way of admitting it and bringing about a reconciliation."

Gradually Pierre came to the surface, and grasped the reality of the invitation he held in his hands. And panic began to creep upward to his throat. He stammered, "I have nothing against them. No reconciliation is needed. They should forget about me. . . . I never go to cocktail parties."

As the words came out, it seemed to him that their echo found no resonance in his own mind, and that a kind of witches' sabbath took its place. This invitation from Madame Letellier ! The bell of fate was tolling ; the incredible interlocking of contingencies was beginning to function again, and he heard its familiar clicking. He tried to swallow his saliva but could not. His existence was stirring anew like some machine that runs at intervals toward an inevitable destination, and the buzzing that filled his ears seemed to him to reflect the sound of that engine as it began to grind into motion. It had been thus ever since he had given up his vocation—Madame Boisseau's death, the meeting with Willie Savard, and then the encounter with the Attorney-General. He had done everything he could to remove himself from the radiation of that death, the memory of which remained planted in

the centre of his heart, stifling all hope. Yet the events whose plaything he was, by some strange interconnection, clung to the orbit of that radiation, as though acts entirely separate from his remorse had suddenly become its most intimate accomplices. Whose will was it that his lengthy flight should lead him back to the very house where he had seen the elderly lady crumple into death?

The Attorney-General was watching him contentedly. Leaning calmly on his elbows, his neck and shoulders seeming to swell with satisfaction, he was enjoying his achievement, pleased with the effect of his adult cunning upon the emotional adolescent who for a moment had disturbed his equilibrium. The young fellow would be much easier to handle than he had expected.

"If you refuse, you prove that you're no diplomat. I know the generosity of your heart; but if you thrust aside the outstretched hand my sister-in-law and my nephew are offering you by inviting you to this party, you will be making a serious mistake, for they will misjudge your motive and think that you scorn their gesture of friendliness. And believe me, there are no worse enemies than those whose friendship one has refused."

"No, no, it's not that," Pierre stammered. "After everything that's happened. . . ."

The Attorney-General rose and went over to him, speaking in a kindly way.

"Oh, these children! The least episode assumes in their eyes the proportions of an everlasting drama. 'Everything that's happened,' you say. Your school rivalry with Yvon? Perfectly natural. Perhaps he spurred you on and helped you to attain your true rank! My sister-in-law's whims? Every mother is like that when her child is involved, especially if he is a spoiled child. And the business of those caricatures! A Punch and Judy show staged by a student at a loss for practical jokes—a silly business, and a bit of

a headache to me, I admit, but it also brought me the good fortune of meeting you and observing your fine qualities."

"A silly business that brought a priest to his death," said Pierre restlessly, thinking the while of that dark room where the old woman had fallen. Then his eyes widened as the Attorney-General elaborately shrugged his shoulders.

"Bah! He had a bad heart and the least bit of ill temper could have been fatal to him. Besides, every one of us plays his part in killing someone, in one way or another. So I suppose we should hang everybody. You see what I mean? But fortunately it's not so easy to become a criminal."

Pierre could not hold back a tremulous exclamation of triumph. "You believe that?" He jumped to his feet, standing a little taller than the man upon whom he now gazed so intently.

Upon hearing those eager words and seeing Perre's uneasiness and his devouring eyes, the Minister bent his head and said stiffly, "Certainly, my boy, I believe that." Yet almost at once his prosecutor's curiosity was aroused, and he looked sharply at Pierre. "Tell me, have you, yourself, killed anyone?"

"I? No. That is, in the same way as everyone else does, I suppose. I accept the cocktail invitation," he added hastily.

"Fine!" cried the Attorney-General. "We'll drink to our victims' health. Good! Now let me do a bit of work. I must organize a raid on our Communist friends one of these days, when the time is ripe. Then you'll have no more suspicions of our playing ball with them. And everything will be back to normal."

Without even noticing that he had pushed open the baize door and that it had closed behind him, Pierre found

himself back in his office. Several minutes slipped by before he could see anything in its right perspective. As the tension between his bewildered thoughts and his feelings diminished, there grew within him a raging anger that brought a grim and sullen expression to his face. "Each of us has played his part in killing someone." "No, no ! That was much too easy. And the Minister had gone blissfully, on chatting about problems which were sheer torture to Pierre Boisjoly, problems which vitiated every source and every horizon ! " Yes, my boy, I believe that." He had murmured the sentence as though admitting his complicity yet feeling no remorse. And that his " Tell me, have you, yourself, killed anyone ? " With what a tone of friendly curiosity he had asked the question ! How had Pierre, despite his confusion, succeeded in giving so skilful an answer ? Pierre was ashamed of his evasion, for now he heard more distinctly the threat of the chastisement which awaited him at the end of his road. Cowardice had taken root in his soul with his first lapse, which is also the opening wedge for habit. How could one brief week have succeeded in lulling him into the illusion of a false security, to such a point that the circumstances which had placed him in this enviable position had begun to seem remote and of no great importance ? But his employer was wide awake ; he was polishing his weapons for a combat which delighted him, but which was of so little concern to Pierre that his loving heart had mistaken the enemy's smile for a sign of affection. After all, what would it matter to him from now on whether or not these Letelliers appraised him at his true worth, whether or not he took their proffered hands ?

The more he thought about the cocktail party, the better he could review the course of the events that were leading him back to the fateful house, and the more clearly could he see approaching that day of reckoning toward which he had been impelled for the last year. This was no time to

surrender his negative to the Attorney-General, and join the anonymous ranks of those who are bored and embittered because at the last moment they shied away from destiny. He would wait, and take such a step only if circumstances compelled him to it. "I'll go!" he said.

2

DIGNIFIED ladies and gentlemen, emerging from a row of limousines drawn up along the sidewalk, displayed a certain eager haste as they approached the festive, brightly illuminated house from which there now issued a crescendo of party noises. The surrounding houses seemed reduced to a sketchy background, existing only as shadowy onlookers.

That perfect hostess, Huguette Letellier, was moving from one group to another, sheathed in a black silk dress whose striking shoulder-straps attracted the other women's admiring or critical attention; upon each of them was embroidered a swallow with outstretched wings, its beak pointing toward one of her breasts, the upper portion of which was visible above the neckline. "An Italian creation!" Huguette explained in a roguish, artificial tone, with a coquettish little toss of her head. She bustled from judge to cabinet minister, from lawyer to doctor, from journalist to contractor. Fifty people were gathered in her house, either for lack of anything better to do or in the hope of advancing themselves. The ambitious among them were feverishly animated; those in whom life barely stirred cherished an illusion of activity by engaging in incoherent and empty talk; and the women of this democratic day, shorn of the glory of those artistocratic ages that knew so well how to make spoiled darlings of them, sought desperately to recapture the magnificence of bygone times in the drab substitutes offered them by the twentieth century. In every hand a glass twinkled; waiters nimbly passed trays; flirtations and conversations began, the hubbub grew ever livelier, everyone was drowned in

festivity, and the remainder of the world had ceased to exist. Huguette Letellier, however, seemed to live only in her expectation of one special guest's arrival, and from time to time she would thrust her way impatiently toward the entrance hall, her face momentarily betraying the true state of her mind, which was one of bewildered wrath. Another false alarm! Evidently she had rushed to the hall in vain, for the servant stationed there was rocking idly on his heels, his hands behind his back.

Yvon Letellier had nervously followed his mother, and they were now joined by the Attorney-General, who patiently grasped his sister-in-law's arm and once again repeated to her in that fatherly voice which had begun to disturb Pierre, "Huguette, you're too nervous. You promised you'd be agreeable. This is a serious matter. The Prime Minister knows nothing about the affair, and I don't want him to learn of it. It's most important to us all that he shouldn't. I repeat, this Boisjoly is a violent boy, but extremely sensitive. Our job is to lull him to sleep, be nice to him, until the day when we lay hands on that famous negative. Yvon put his foot in it; now we have to get that foot back without harming the family in the process. What's more, we intercepted an interesting telephone conversation yesterday afternoon. We're on a very hot trail. Later on, I'll do whatever you want with Boisjoly."

"Uncle is right," Yvon added with feigned nonchalance. "My future is involved, and that damned photograph could seriously compromise it. Later on we can get even with him to your heart's content. What call are you talking about, Uncle?"

"As for you, for heaven's sake keep out of this, and wait to see what happens."

The handsome widow, livid with anger, glanced now at one man, now at the other. "For ten years this gutter rat

has stood in Yvon's way, and you want me to be calm. Perhaps I should throw my arms around him and kiss him? This charwoman's offspring acted like a beast in this very house; he insulted me, and you insist that I receive him as a conqueror! It's beyond belief! The filthy brat has got us by the throat! . . . All right," she said after a moment or two, her lips tight. "Since it must be."

"You'll forget all this when the day comes for us to even the score," remarked Yvon, patting her hair.

She drew away angrily and returned to her guests, muttering, "And the little upstart allows himself the liberty of coming late, just to top it all!"

The two men, left to themselves, looked at each other in worried silence.

At last Pierre stood on the pavement in front of this brilliantly illuminated house with its hum of society. He neither saw its lights nor heard its joyous reverberations. This was the very spot where Denis Boucher had said, "You were never here to-night. I don't know you, and I alone am involved. Get going; let me never lay eyes on you again!" And the echo of his rapid footsteps had dwindled into the night. His lips dry and his hands icy, Pierre tried to walk firmly to the door. But the sound of his heels on the narrow cement walk made more and more vivid, the closer he approached his goal, that June evening when he had run on tiptoe like a thief and had crept into the silent dwelling through the kitchen window. Three days later, through this great yawning portal, a coffin had emerged, borne by six men in black. He tottered with emotion. Fear surged up from the pit of his stomach in a spasm even more violent than that which had made him run from the cemetery like a madman, with his thirty-six roses under his arm. Yet if he ran to-day he would go on running for ever. "Lord God!" he murmured. He

managed to climb the steps and then, with his clenched fist pressed the doorbell.

The servant beckoned him into the hallway and took his overcoat. Here, a year earlier, he had entered, wild with anger, and an old woman who was knitting in the small parlour had come out and spoken gently to him. And ever since, his life had been but one long night through which he blindly groped, stumbling against that ghost at every turn. Then his eyes fixed upon the wide flight of stairs, and he did not notice Huguette Letellier coming toward him, her hand outstretched, followed by the Attorney-General, who was making signs of appeasement and welcome. Yvon stayed just within the living-room, glancing toward the hall but keeping up a lively conversation with a young girl.

"Pierre Boisjoly!" exclaimed Madame Letellier. "How you do make people wait for you! That's how it is when a man is steering the ship of state. Oh, the stairway—yes, I suppose it must bring back memories." Coquettishly she grasped his arm and propelled him toward the drawing-room. "We've been awaiting you with impatience."

He could think of no reply. The woman who had breathed the breath of life into the universal conspiracy against Pierre Boisjoly now held him firmly by the elbow—arrogant and smiling, feverishly resolute—and Pierre, his whole body tense, felt certain that as she stood triumphantly beside him she was plotting her revenge. The young man's eyes, wide with distress, saw the crowd of guests as a squirming, multi-coloured mass, heedlessly chattering, bespangled with bald pates and silky locks that glistened and shone under the brilliance of the chandeliers. Huguette Letellier brought him to a halt just inside the drawing-room, clinging to him as though to draw everyone's attention and provoke curiosity about this unknown youth's attendance at her party.

Despite the moment's bewildering intensity, Pierre was beginning to analyse the mass at which he gazed ; people assumed more definite shapes in the clouded atmosphere, and looked to him a little like fish seen in an aquarium. He felt as though the whole gathering were turning toward him. Mermaids draped in sombre taffetas and velvets gracefully twisted and turned, and long black fish swam hypocritically by, close to the glass, their big round eyes dimmed by the bubbles of his imagination.

" Well ! Well ! Is this your annual surprise ? " asked a prominent highways contractor.

Laughter broke out here and there and then spread through the room, and Pierre, motionless, his eyes closed, felt it sink into his ears and mingle with his pain.

" No, he's the son of my former cleaning woman," Huguette had just whispered in a low voice to a group of her intimates. " You know how democratic I am."

The Attorney-General interrupted and, in a voice he tried to make cordial, addressed the few person who had heard his sister-in-law's reply.

" Come, now, I must be allowed to introduce my own secretary."

He took the young man in tow. Pierre, who had suspected some cheap irony, was hot with anger. The glances which had briefly rested on him were withdrawn, and the tumult resumed its full exuberance. In her fury Huguette Letellier seemed not to notice the quick look of annoyance her brother-in-law gave her as he turned away.

Glassy-eyed, Pierre continued to stare at the woman whose whispering he was sure was directed against him. Just as the Attorney-General was handing him a glass, he saw her regain her poise, she was now surrounded by ladies who were gathering to hear the rest of the story. Huguette Letellier kept her voice low, nodding her head significantly,

haughtily; and the women listening to her, who looked like a flock of pecking hens, stared at Pierre in amazement. He imagined the words she was murmuring: "Yes, my dear, the son of my former charwoman, Mama Boisjoly. His pastor paid for his education. We've taken him under our wing." How could he remain as he was, seething with rage and saying nothing? What a treat it would have been to take a stout stick and lay it on those faces and heads until they were reduced to silence! Too long had he forgotten his boundless anger in the assembly hall when, rushed to the limit of his endurance by Huguette Letellier's insults, he had violently thrust aside his chosen career, swearing to fight this wicked and damned society. The image of Fernande, of the old woman lying dead—his whole strange adventure had come between him and the major aspect of his problem, and in his pilgrim's progress he had found this world too small to involve himself in battles which no longer enthralled him. Even without the terrible remorse that weighed upon his life, there would have been the same inevitable crisis: the discovery, too late, that the struggle in which you crush your enemy under foot never equals the sublime joy of giving yourself generously in perfect charity. But this woman was beginning again to smear him with hate; and if the thought of Fernande no longer threw his young heart into confusion, he still considered himself too soiled by remorse to dream anew of staking his hopes on love. Why didn't he clear out of here? Had he not had a share in killing this woman's mother? He drained his glass.

"My word!" said the Attorney-General, "you're polishing it off! I can sympathize somewhat with your state of mind, your embarrassment. My sister-in-law is like that; she loves to make a sensation; one has to forgive her."

"I told you she had no use for me," Pierre replied,

looking fixedly at the bottom of the glass he clasped in both hands. "I should not have come."

"An obsession, my friend ! You see enemies everywhere. You must harden yourself, get used to all sorts of people, to the different levels of society. My sister-in-law is worldly, a trifle noisy and easily angered—true enough. But at heart she's a decent sort, whose principal handicap is that she can't express her feelings straightforwardly. So people take her most sincere utterances for idle small-talk and mistake a certain . . . let's say timidity for an attitude of disdain. Where on earth is Yvon ? We'll find him eventually. Come along, let's circulate among these good people ; I think we'll find a number of pretty girls."

Pierre, a freshly filled glass in his hand, let himself be steered from group to group, instinctively shaping his features into that expression of false interest which hypocritically draws us close to the strangers whose hands we shake in the midst of a throng. Girls smirked at him, trying to involve him in flirtatious conversations ; he turned away, blushing, only to be snared in another net of the small talk spread out by each group in its attempt to capture this fascinating specimen. How out of place he seemed, how loutish and barbarous he felt amidst this prosperous frivolity ! Yet despite his confused emotions a strange intensity began to rise within him, inspired by the whisky. His eyes quickly appraised the various groups, classifying them by their apparent degree of animation. The most boisterous gaiety reigned near the big window of the drawing-room.

Surrounded by guests in spasms of mirth, which redoubled in intensity whenever they could catch their breath, a kind of hilarious dwarf, with the plump pink cheeks of a doll was waving his hands and talking with Rabelaisian inventiveness, gulping his whisky and devouring hors d'œuvres and at the same time cracking jokes through his mois

mouthfuls of food—jokes ending in surges of laughter that encouraged and then overwhelmed the laughter of his listeners. A few words uttered in a burst of comic rage were heard above the general tumult.

“Saint Thomas Aquinas, patron of fine food and good wine, is my special hero and my spiritual father. As Noah’s grandson, he undertook to defend his grandfather in the bosom of the Church, and from his niche in heaven he’ll certainly forgive me for having—a trifle tardily, indeed—preferred marriage to chastity and drinking in the salon to withering in the cloister. Saint Thomas, I drink and shall always drink to your rugged good sense. Amen.”

“That loud-mouthed character,” the Attorney-General whispered in Pierre’s ear, “is Robert Larochelle. He was formerly a Jesuit, but left the Society just before his ordination, about four years ago. In those days he was all skin and bone, worn down by repressions and inner stresses of every sort. He’s done pretty well, making up for lost time. He dashes around, always on the run, and overdoes everything. He finished his law course and married, last year—a very pretty girl; she’s doubtless around here somewhere, hemmed in by admirers much younger than her unfrocked priest. At present he’s a lawyer without a case to plead and is moving heaven and earth to get a job in the Department. He’ll have to wait a long while; he’s just a trifle too talkative. But because of his monstrous capacity for laughter, he’s invited to every cocktail party. Yet he never forgets his ambition. So I’d not be surprised if, knowing you’re my secretary, he buttonholes you shortly and tries to get into your good graces. Watch out for him.”

Pierre immediately detested this raucous and vulgar turncoat, not so much because in the petty drawing-room world he flouted the dignity of the priesthood, as because of the hateful parallel his own career might offer this lawyer’s.

"Handsome and melancholy sir, let me drink from your glass so that I may share your thoughts."

A roguish, sharp-shouldered blonde, obviously well-plied already, grabbed his arm. His body stiffened with embarrassment, Pierre stopped short and awkwardly inclined his glass toward the greedy mouth with its uneven smears of lipstick.

"Aw! . . . give me a real drink! You act like a mother with a baby."

"Pierre, this is Monique Giroux, my tennis partner." A lock of blond hair flopping over a quizzical brow, eyes half-closed, an ironic smile twisting his lips, Yvon Letellier was offering to shake hands. Pierre looked at the outstretched hand with scandalized eyes—that same hand, one moonlit night, had reached up to nail a sacrilegious poster to the telephone pole before the Institute, under Big Dick's eye. He made no move to touch it, and watched it drop back rigidly to Yvon's side. With downcast eyes Pierre emptied his glass, for he could hear rising from his chest a small, muted and savage laugh that blended with the first effects of the whisky. There followed an icy silence the strain of which Monique, despite her tipsiness, did her best to dispel. She drew Pierre away toward a tall, bald old man, who was looking the guests over as though they were members of a jury and who spoke so deliberately that his least remark sounded like a judgment.

"This is my father," simpered Monique. "I'm handing him over to you, Papa. He's a very serious young man."

He's inspecting me as though I had a criminal record, thought Pierre.

"I turn him over to you, my dear Judge," said the Attorney-General. And he walked away to rejoin Yvon who, pale with fury, had withdrawn to the edge of the crowd.

"At least," the Attorney-General hissed at him, "you control yourself better than your mother."

"He'll pay for that!" growled Yvon.

Meanwhile Pierre, feeling the waves of hatred eddying behind him, waited for Judge Giroux to begin the conversation. His features crabbed, his glance spiritless yet sharp, this gentleman examined Pierre from head to foot, his left shoulder slightly advanced as though to call attention to his Legion of Honour rosette—the result of countless overtures to the French consulate—and assumed the attitude of a silent Sphinx in order to hide the fact that he was merely a bored old codger with nothing to say.

"How old are you, young man? Hum!"

"Twenty."

"Young. Very young indeed. Hum! Shall you study law?"

"No, I don't think so."

He thought angrily of the spoiled priest who was squealing like a pig. And this whisky made you thirsty. He snatched a full glass from a passing tray.

"Hum! You have to get through with your law, young man."

The judge remained motionless and continued to look him over with those sharp, lack-lustre eyes, clearing his throat each time he swallowed. The Attorney-General was gone, and Pierre dared not adventure in this dangerous jungle without a guide. Not yet had he learned to give bores the slip. And even had he wished to, he was powerless; he saw himself the prisoner of this be-ribboned mummy whose hands, white as wax, must on certain terrifying days slowly draw on the black gloves and solemnly don the three-cornered hat. The question sprang to his lips: "Have you condemned many men to death?"

"Eleven. My last one was big Charlot, who murdered the widow Hébert."

"The first time must have been terrible?" asked Pierre, his hand tightening on his glass.

"Yes. Hum! Yes. It was a queer experience. My wife very nearly wore mourning. But. . . Hum! As you go on, you get used to it. Justice must prevail."

"... until you are dead," thought Pierre. Open-mouthed, his eyes rapt in a vision beyond any his remorse had ever before allowed him to conceive, he imagined himself standing in the prisoner's box listening to Judge Giroux sentence him to be hanged. In some drawing-room a week later, the judge would say, "Hum! Yes, indeed . . . Pierre Boisjoly. He's my twelfth—you know, the young seminary student, an accomplice in Madame Boisseau's murder." And that would be all; he would be gone, and everyone would have forgotten him, and no one would suspect that he had sought to be splendid—for even a second, a minute, one brief day. Furious rebellion surged up in him against that feeling of guilt which made his body rigid and his head heavy; then in a distraught appeal to the idea of innocence he raised his glance toward the ceiling. But the ceiling rocked, his glass trembled in his fingers, for the infernal machine was hastening events and—he felt it—sweeping him along to a dark and terrifying end.

The judge, unaccustomed to the silence of others, left Pierre to his own devices in the middle of the living-room. But his daughter, accompanied by two young girls who focused on Pierre eyes so languid they were almost beseeching, came to his rescue. Pierre heard her introducing her companions, but their names skimmed the surface of his consciousness. He did gather that they were inviting him to join a group of young people in the small parlour where they would dance the tango. Tango with these innocent dolls, when the tom-tom of destiny was beating in his head! Besides, he did not know how to dance. Ridiculous!

"A scruple, my friend, a mere scruple. You haven't yet rid yourself of all the rubbish of a religious vocation, and I can understand that. Our hostess has just told me your story."

The rotund lawyer, the Rabelaisian Larochelle, had edged over toward him, and the three young women fled like startled magpies.

"Yes, I know all about it," the lawyer continued with a solemn sweeping gesture. "You can still feel on your back the cassock to which you had grown so accustomed in your thoughts, and you blush at the thought of taking a girl in your arms. I myself wore it, touched it with my fingers, felt it flapping around my legs and brushing against my shoes. It's dreadful; you see Christ in every corner; for God is everywhere, as the Shorter Catechism tells us, but He is denser in church, naturally enough. A matter of intensity. It took me four years to rid myself of all that, and now I live, I breathe. You'll see how happy you'll be when you have achieved my degree of de-cassocking."

"Let go of my arm!" Pierre muttered, without looking at him.

"I see it perfectly; you're going through 'a crisis,'" said the ex-Jesuit in the affectionate tones of intimacy. "Have you slept with a woman yet? You must. What I did was to get married. Do you know my wife? Just a moment, I'll find her. Wait here."

He walked off officiously, searching among the groups of guests. Suddenly Pierre felt a gentle tug on his sleeve. "Pierre!" That feminine voice with its trace of huskiness! His heart beating heavily against the sudden constriction of his throat, he turned around.

He did not exclaim, "Fernande!" How could he utter a single word when his whole being was but one cry of surprise and joy?

"How startled I was when I first saw you, a little

while ago ! Ever since, I've been trying to get near you."

His eyes were devouring her with a sort of animal eagerness. Her wonderful, lustrous black hair, her green eyes, so wide and so pure, her full lips, ready to bite ! He saw her again as he had seen her the first time, bare-footed in her slippers, drawing her faded green wrapper tight across her chest and smoothing her long hair with a tiny comb. She had burst upon him then, her expression inquiring and a little startled, just as at this moment ; and now she spoke with worried and frightened haste.

" I am married to a lawyer, Robert Larochelle. You must not show that you know me Do that for my sake ; I'll explain later."

" Robert Larochelle ? Very well," he said mechanically.

Then he exploded in a sort of stifled sob : " No ! It's impossible."

A bestial jealousy suddenly assailed him. But he did not for long remain in the grip of unreasoning instinct. How could she have become the wife of this appalling man who had said, " You must sleep with a woman. What I did was to get married." Because of his vision of Fernande, of her disturbing body which he had passionately imagined pure, Pierre had betrayed his vocation and become the toy of strange events. And Fernande was now the wife of the man he scorned more than anyone else in the world. He had been right to fear this cocktail party, where he was keeping an appointment with calamity. Her eyes lowered, Fernande was biting her lips and did not reply.

Pierre glanced distractedly about him. Yvon Letellier, leaning against the door-jamb, was watching him closely, and now seemed startled ; he frowned, and concentrated all his attention on Fernande, whom he was trying to place. Where on earth had he seen her before ?

" Oh ! You're here already ? " cried Mr. Larochelle,

who had returned and was now preparing to introduce his wife to Pierre.

But Pierre, seized by a devouring obsession, abruptly turned his back on them and automatically began to follow the bald pate of Judge Giroux, who was leaving the drawing-room and mounting the stairs. What was there now to hope for? The highest level of society was rotten, hateful, and petty. Fernande had sold herself to that Judas, and Pierre himself had a crime to expiate. His true crime was that he had ceased to feel himself small and loving before God—he, too, had turned into one of these arrogant, grotesque bullfrogs. His existence deserved no more than to fizzle out this very evening, in the middle of a cocktail party, where he would make his confession to a tiresome and world-weary judge. And Pierre would have like this conclusion to be a hundred times sillier still!

By the time he had caught up with the judge and feebly spoken his name, beads of sweat were standing on his forehead. The judge did not stop; instead he put on speed and reached the head of the stairs. Pierre called to him again. But the judge gave him an embarrassed nod and disappeared behind a door which he locked with prosthetic haste.

Standing there, still full of his tragic decision, his arms hanging limp at his sides, Pierre suddenly caught sight of himself in a pier-glass and burst into nervous laughter. There had probably never been such a situation before, in all the world's history. "A repentant criminal pursues a judge to confess his crime and is obliged, in the end, to wait until the latter has relieved himself." Then the laughter froze in his throat. The room, the bed covered with black coats, reflected in the mirror! He recognized the position of the door; and the old lady had lain on the floor, parallel to these overcoats which, by some trick of the mirror, seemed to move, as though they were inhabited by skeletons aware

of his presence. He imagined their serried ranks advancing behind him, and he dared not turn around. He hurtled down the stairs like a madman and literally 'dropped at Fernande's feet as she pretended to examine a fern in the hallway.

"Are you sick?" she asked in quick anxiety.

He looked toward the head of the stairs and shook his head. "You know what my trouble is!" he panted.

"You despise me?"

"Yes."

"That isn't fair of you. You know nothing of the life I have lived," she murmured. "Come. Have as much faith in me as though I had told you the whole story."

"You have my faith."

It had been a rapid exchange between them, like the furtive caresses of two unhappy people. After long months of dull, monotonous living, she had suddenly, on seeing Pierre, rediscovered a whole exciting past, which had abruptly terminated on that very June day when Pierre had come to Denis Boucher's room. Once more she saw that wild look of his, in the midst of this gesticulating mob, and—the whisky doing its part—her whole being yearned toward the mystery of this youth who took on in her eyes the character of an heroic knight.

Drawn along by a hand that grasped him tenderly, his only thought now was of the delicious well-being invading him, against which he did not even dream of defending himself. Nor did he notice Yvon Letellier standing near the door, smiling now as he watched them; his hands were down at his sides, and he nervously flicked his fingers in satisfaction. It was the same girl who had been there on the day of the prize-giving, sitting between Father Lippé and a certain Latin Quarter idler! When his mother happened to pass near him, Yvon whispered in triumph "Mother, I think I've got him this time! A marvellous

scheme ! But don't say anything to Uncle. I'm going to show him that I can correct my mistakes myself."

The strains of a tango emerged in syncopated gusts from the small parlour where couples were dancing. Pierre was not astonished at the absolute happiness in the depths of which his being seemed at rest for all eternity, a happiness which swung gently to the rhythm of this music. Fernande's startling presence here, resurrected from a distant past right into this drawing-room, and seemingly for the sole purpose of quenching for a moment the thirst she had aroused in his heart the year before, bathed him in such joy as he had never known and made his flesh impervious to everything except the affectionate warmth of this enchanting woman, so close to his side that his suit was wed to the folds of her dress.

"Let's go find my husband," she said. "He's worried about your health. He spoke of inviting you to our flat for coffee. After all the things we've had to eat here, we don't need dinner. Please don't refuse. We have so many things to tell each other."

He listened to her words, savouring them as they melted in his ear, and the meaning he found in them was all tenderness and music. He moved into the crowd as though he were moving into a cinema screen and mingling with its images.

"Robert !" cried Fernande as she propelled Pierre toward the lawyer. "At last I have found our wild man. He felt dizzy for a moment or two, but he's fine now. I laid hands on him just as he was recovering. I introduced myself, and we've quickly become good friends."

Larochelle remarked with a smile of naive triumph, "It's really contagious, old chap. When I saw my wife for the first time, I felt dizzy too. When I become a cabinet minister, Fernande, I'll take you to Rome and you'll probably give our Holy Father the Pope vertigo."

Why was Pierre no longer repelled by the mouthings of this loathsome attorney? Perhaps because he was Fernande's husband, and Pierre wanted to stay close by her side? His mind erased the words as they were uttered, as though to avoid having to tolerate them for ulterior reasons. But a vague questioning began to invade Pierre's bliss. How adroit Fernande was! Had this lawyer taught her such artfulness?

"Robert, it would be pleasant if Monsieur Bojsjoly could spend the rest of the evening with us."

"A brilliant idea," said the lawyer enthusiastically. He glanced hastily around him, probably to reassure himself that his departure would not spoil his chance with someone who might be more immediately useful to his ambitions.

"So you have already made friends?" the Attorney-General murmured in Pierre's ear, like a croupier congratulating a novice gambler on his first winnings. "But be careful, as I warned you."

"Quite a secretary you have there," said Larochelle, drawing himself up on his stubby legs. "He has only one fault; he gets dizzy very quickly. But I'm taking him home with me and we shall see what we shall see."

"I wish you luck!" said the Attorney-General, with a bow and an amused smile. As he turned away he gave Pierre's arm a stealthy squeeze.

The guests were beginning to go. Larochelle asked for a taxi and all three made ready to leave. Pierre, posting himself near the door, watched the lawyer and Fernande thanking Huguette Letellier. He looked at the staircase, and once again he saw his mother polishing the floor; then the words this rich woman had earlier whispered about him came back to humiliate him. He made no move to pay his respects. From that moment he dismissed these Letelliers wholly from his life, for he felt sure they would not cross his path again.

But Yvon Letellier, who was watching him from the door of the small parlour, was rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

Judge Giroux came slowly down the stairs. He crooked a finger at Pierre, who pretended not to see him and left the house to wait for the Larochelles.

THE taxi bounded along. Fernande, seated between her husband and Pierre, let herself be jounced without resistance, and the attitude she had forced herself to take toward Pierre enveloped her in an aura of gentle mystery. She remembered with emotion how fervently he had insisted on believing in her purity despite Denis's cruel remarks. And he had said, "I'll win out!" in a sullen voice. He had already kept his promise with amazing ease. In one short year he had become the Attorney-General's secretary, preserving his proud and intransigent manner into the bargain, whereas her own husband, despite his law degree, his age, and his boot-licking, had not succeeded in obtaining even a minor job in that ministry.

"Franciscans' Street, driver," said Larochelle. "Ha! ha! Don't be surprised, my dear Boisjoly; that's the address that puts me at the farthest remove from the Jesuits."

"The Franciscans are admirable priests," Pierre answered coolly. "I am very fond of them."

The fresh air had restored his self-possession. Once outside the Letelliers', where he had been torn by conflicting emotions, he was again the Pierre Boisjoly of the victorious days, balanced, whole, powerful, his arms stretched out toward his fate. Fernande's shoulder rested lingeringly against his own. His heart beat fast but without constraint, free of the familiar suffering. Surely he would soon come to his adventure's end; his life was moving faster and faster; but with Fernande as the forerunner of that last and decisive lap in his race, his pain changed into quiet happiness. Yet she had been Denis Boucher's mistress and

was now—even worse—the wife of this lawyer ; but she had begged him to have faith. What did it matter ? His first pure image of her had remained, and Fernande, silent by his side, only made that image dearer to him.

“ That is the church where we go to Mass,” said Fernande, pointing out the Franciscan chapel.

“ And I drag the missal along,” added Larochele. “ It weighs a pound and a half. It gets me down.”

“ Oh ! You go to Mass anyway ? ” asked Pierre.

“ What a question ! ” he grumbled. “ What would people say in the Party if I didn’t go ? And then we die some day. That’s the bother. But I only go on Sundays. Oh, the priesthood—what a distressing vocation ! You are well out of it, too.”

“ The priesthood is the most beautiful and most noble thing in the world,” said Pierre, “ for it is the calling of love and humility.”

There was balm in saying these words, and he felt a great peace swelling within him. There was a brief silence ; then, with a little forced laugh which allowed him to change the subject, the lawyer asked in a falsely innocent tone, “ Will you please tell me what dodge you used to become Letellier’s secretary ? Did the Cardinal pull a string for you ? Or was it for services rendered ? Eh ? ”

Pierre hesitated, noticed the name on a street sign, and said with a smile, “ No, I was secretary to Father Martel, the Franciscan, of the Popular Institute of Social Sciences. The Attorney-General liked him very much. Then, too, the ministry worked very closely with us. So when Father Martel died suddenly last week, I was offered a post at the ministry.”

“ That will teach me to avoid priests,” Larochele naïvely reflected. “ I should have paid more attendance to that priest, hey, Fernande ? But my practice takes up all my time.”

"Yes, your practice," sighed Fernande.

They had come to their destination. The lawyer reached into his pocket and exclaimed, "For heaven's sake! I forgot to go to the bank. You wouldn't have ten dollars on you, Boisjoly? I'll give you a cheque in a few moments."

Pierre hastily slipped him the money, and Fernande bit her lip.

"And now for a liqueur!"

As he followed them up three narrow flights of stairs, it never occurred to Pierre to ask himself why this lawyer who made such a commotion in the parlours of the Grande Allée had such shabby lodgings, or to pity Fernande because she had to live there. At each landing, on to which opened a door with an aluminium number, she turned back and gave him a smile tremulous with a kind of entreating humility, a smile which made him stupidly blissful and led him to hope that she was miserable, so that the desire surging within him to take her head upon his shoulder and console her might be justified.

"Every day these stairs assure me that I'll live to be a hundred," remarked her husband in his strident voice, heroically attempting to lude the fact that he was winded.

They walked in. "It's no castle, but it's all we could find; the housing shortage is dreadful."

The apartment consisted of four small, perfectly cubical rooms; their white plaster walls were already turning yellow, and spotted along them were a few pieces of non-descript furniture prettily covered with flowered chintz. These box-like rooms were lined up along a narrow hall in which, between two doors, Fernande had succeeded in installing a small set of bookshelves. As the three of them moved toward the parlour, Larochele hastily opened a door and slipped Pierre a glance bristling with innuendo. "Our bedroom!" he murmured.

"Robert!" Fernande protested. "Let's go into the living-room."

The lawyer gently closed the door, cordially grasped Pierre's arm, and burst into hearty laughter. They walked in silence to the end of the hall, and Pierre could not hold back the question that clamoured to be asked: "You have no baby?"

"Almost, but it miscarried and we lost it," said the lawyer, his forehead clouding over for an instant.

"What a fool I'm making of myself," thought Pierre, raging inwardly. He could have kicked himself, for Fernande grew pale and glanced at him with such deep supplication that he almost stopped in his tracks. They entered the parlour, where a large piano scarcely left space for an arm-chair and a settee.

"Excuse me for a moment," said Fernande. "I'm going to make coffee."

Pierre, forgetful of the lawyer's presence, followed her with his eyes as far as he could. She had been pregnant, and she had become again the same Fernande he had known in Denis Boucher's room, a Fernande who spoke little, but whose face, whose whole body, glowed with eager interest, or troubled at the slightest sigh, and spoke a language he felt he alone was intended to understand. What did it matter that she had been Denis Boucher's mistress and this lawyer's wife? What was there in common between his Fernande and the woman these men knew? His Fernande, always untouched in her true inwardness, an inwardness to which he believed that he alone had access. Despite everything, a wild jealousy boiled within him; he tried to repress it by twisting his fingers and staring at the rug. How on earth had she come to accept this lawyer as her husband?

"A fine slip of a girl, eh, old man?" said the lawyer, lowering his voice to a confidential level. "We decided to

get married in just three days. It happened in an odd way. We can talk as old friends, since we seem to understand each other. As soon as I had finished my law course I wanted to get married. Fernande was studying Social Service, and I often ran into her on University Street. I didn't let things drag. When you have spent several years in a cloister, it leaves a mark on you. I knew that marriage alone could free me of that terrible scar. You at least changed direction while there was still time. And yet when I was your age, my vocation swept me along like a flame. It's when you pass thirty that the going gets really tough."

Pierre was silent. The lawyer had put aside his mask of Rabelaisian heartiness as he talked, and laid bare his suffering; his whole being was stifled under the accumulated ashes of a fire that had long burned in his vitals; he was madly and vainly struggling now to fight his way out and, a new man, soar toward a new flame. Pierre shuddered; he might have been faithful to his first vocation and nevertheless turned renegade when he grew older, like this lawyer. Fernande's perfume hovered in the room; suddenly he recognized it. Then an agonizing confusion took the place of his contempt for Larochelle, and he said to him with uneasy arrogance: "Yet I know an old priest. He's almost seventy and his faith is wonderful."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "You mean some simple-minded pastor who never got promoted? Not the same thing at all. They don't read enough. By the time their eyes might perhaps be opened, they fall back into childhood, and so they are saved. Only children and women are capable of a blind faith. But intellectuals! Mature minds! Do you realize that the study of a single heresy can dangerously disturb an honest theologian? But theologians in general are able champions of a cause which sharpens their talents as jousts, and very often they defend that cause with greater skill than faith."

"Then long live the Curé d'Ars!" Pierre exclaimed.

"Perhaps," said the lawyer. "In any case, I'm out of it, and I took precautions against becoming an eccentric ragamuffin stuffed with obsessions, like one of my brothers in religion who left the cloister for reasons unknown to me. He is now a male nurse in a hospital full of nuns and gouty old folk. His room is next to the chaplain's, whom he affects to despise, but whom he follows around like a poodle. His room puts you in mind of a museum for religious objects, for the fellow has turned into a mad collector of priestly apparel. Under a glass globe he has installed the red shoes of a deceased cardinal; candlesticks are piled high on the furniture, his closets are stuffed with cassocks of every variety, carefully wrapped in a cover against the dust—black cassocks, violet cassocks, white, brown, dark red. The walls have disappeared behind richly bound books, all dealing with religious subjects from church architecture to the ailments of the popes. Every cent he earns is spent on such things. When he strokes his treasures, he shivers with excitement, like a miser or a maniac. And he likewise shivers when he leafs through volumes of pornography. Do you know what is his fondest dream? Some day to journey to Rome and obtain one of the Pope's garments."

"How nauseating," said Pierre. "Obviously, as Father Laroche would say, there are all sorts of fools."

"Well, I'm not one of them," Laroche retorted. "I got married."

Pierre watched the lawyer like a bird of prey. "And is that enough to make you forget the flame that inspired you in your twenties?"

The lawyer started and looked at Pierre with fright in his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"What I said."

"No . . . not enough, as yet. But if I had children. Alas. . ."

"So you won't have any?" asked Pierre in a tone of triumph which it did not occur to him to hide.

Larochelle sighed, and looked toward the kitchen. Then, obviously upset, he inquired, "And what do you make of this lay world, where one must struggle, and where any thought or reflection not concerned with one's ambition or self-interest is out of place?"

"Does it satisfy you?" Pierre turned aside his head as he spoke.

The lawyer nervously tamped his cigarette butt in the ash tray. "One has to try to forget. Adolescent passions which last for a lifetime are pathological. What you demand leads nowhere."

Pierre's eyes absent-mindedly followed the outlines of a pattern in the carpet. "Nothing gets anyone anywhere, since the world's first sin, except to abase oneself at God's feet, with absolute trust in His love, despite our bitterness, our temptations, our weaknesses. Only there lies greatness!"

The lawyer burst into long, vexed laughter. "Go say that to the Prime Minister and see whether he'll give you a post in the Cabinet. And anyway it was certainly not for such reasons that you became the Attorney-General's secretary," he added, softening his tone until it sounded almost comradely.

"The Attorney-General will know my opinion in this matter, and perhaps it will give him something to think about, if he has the time available. I imagine the Jesuits—those who stayed on—think as I do."

There was a brief silence, and then Larochelle lifted his hands in resignation. "Oh, well! I suppose that you were made to become a priest and that I was fated to set myself free. Fernande! Is that coffee ready?" he called out, as impatient as a waiting buggy-driver.

Pierre clenched his fists. Smiling, Fernande hurried in, the grace of her movements concealing her haste. "Here

"I am, here I am. It's ready." She placed the tray on a low table. "Do you take milk in your coffee, Monsieur Boisjoly?"

Pierre longed to kiss Fernande's tapering, delicate hand as it nervously flitted from sugar-bowl to milk-jug under the threat of a tyrannical and ill-bred scolding from this unfrocked priest, who hustled her as though she were an altar boy too slow for his taste.

"Well, now? What secrets did you men confide in each other?"

The question seemed to stimulate Larochelle. "I was just going to ask Boisjoly something. We're on intimate terms already"—Fernande glanced at Pierre in astonishment, but he, seated a little out of the lawyer's line of vision, violently shook his head—"so I was about to ask him, if it's not indiscreet, what he's paid for his work at the office . . . just to see how it compares with the salary of a friend of mine."

"You aren't drinking your coffee, Monsieur Boisjoly?" Fernande asked in a tone which meant, "Please excuse him, I beg of you!"

"My salary?" Pierre answered, and suddenly it occurred to him that the lawyer had not yet returned his ten dollars. "My salary? Frankly, that's a matter we have not yet discussed."

The lawyer eyed him as though he were some sort of oddity. "You mean to say that you don't know how much you earn each month?"

"No," said Pierre wearily.

Had he known of an incantation that would make this man blow away in smoke, he would certainly have uttered it, for the lawyer's presence prevented his yielding himself to the magic of a universe which the mere sight of Fernande spread wide before him. He closed his eyes and drank his coffee.

"Can you beat that, Fernande? Each and every one of us is engrossed in his receipts and disbursements, and here is a gentleman who does not even know what he earns. He doesn't deserve his good luck. If he had a wife to support and, as a lawyer, had to earn his living by seizing poor people's furniture when they fall behind in their payments to the department stores, he'd make it his business—and damn quick—to discover the amount of his monthly cheque. Now let's have a liqueur. I'll be back in a moment."

As Larochelle stumped heavily out to the kitchen Pierre put down his cup. He felt so shy and confused, and so embarrassed by the lawyer's remarks, that he could hardly bring himself to look at Fernande, who was sitting on the piano bench. She did not smile at him, but whispered urgently, "Give me your address and telephone number. I have to talk to you. I must tell you everything."

Blushingly, he complied, his mind shaken by a gust of vaguely illicit ideas which this request had released. Whispered conversations among his schoolmates, tales heard in the lumber camps about adventures in brothels, violently surged from the dregs of his memory and tingled in his ears. A restless force excited him, like that aroused by Noiraud Labourdette when he had spoken of lovely girls as they stood together beside a dead deer. The rosy mist through which he had seen Fernande since their meeting at the Letelliers' suddenly disappeared, and in its place came a yearning of his whole body for that mouth, those splendid arms, those hips, those legs, for this flesh, this woman—Fernande—the only woman for whom he had ever felt such a yearning, at once so demanding and so gentle.

"I want to speak to you, too. I have many things to say," he murmured.

The sound of cupboard doors angrily slammed, and of impatient mutterings, issued from the kitchen. Pierre cast

a despairing glance at Fernande. This man and woman were married, joined together for life. What was he doing here, arranging secret meetings, letting every fibre of his being delight in its eagerness for this woman who responded feverishly behind a mask of affectionate interest?

"Where is that damned bottle?" shouted Larochelle.

The words Pierre had uttered to the lawyer a few moments earlier came back to him: "Nothing gets anyone anywhere, since the world's first sin, except to abase oneself at God's feet. . . ." He had no right to this happiness into which he saw himself sinking, it would get him nowhere. What was he doing here? He had abandoned his vocation, killed an old woman, and God was impatiently waiting to confront him with his punishment.

"Forgive me, I'm leaving," he whispered in terror.

She had jumped up to run to her husband and try to calm him. When she heard Pierre's words, her face tightened with pain and she clutched his arm. "If you. . . . Oh! stay! I've been happy, so happy, for the last hour . . . in spite of that."

She went quickly to the kitchen. Pierre paced up and down the little room, tripping over the piano bench. From Larochelle's furious outbursts he gathered that someone must have drunk up the brandy, that there must be some left, that anyway she should have bought more. Fernande begged him to stop yelling, and the lawyer, irritated by her whisperings, shouted louder and louder as though he wanted to provoke a violent domestic scene.

"Your carelessness will plunge me for good and all into the hell of failure! Because that's just what failure is—it's hell!"

She must have replied gently that she had not a penny left in her purse, for he at once stopped proclaiming his displeasure and came back to the living-room, his face beaming with unexpected cordiality. Fernande followed

him. She was pale, and her features were drawn and weary from the part she had had to play.

"I don't want any liqueur," said Pierre curtly.

"You're wise—since there isn't any! I had forgotten that I finished the bottle last evening. Too bad."

The tone of the reply stung Pierre like a slap in the face. Fernande was suffering, and there seemed nothing he could do about it. He felt as though he were coiling up, ready to spring, to fight. But her presence moderated the effect of his anger, and her husband had time to change the subject before Pierre could speak.

"Suppose you play the piano for us a while, my dear?"

"I'd be delighted," she replied, visibly overjoyed at the proffered diversion.

As she took her place at the keyboard and Pierre, settling down again, was preparing to forget the lawyer in order to yield himself wholly to the message Fernande would give him through her music, the telephone rang. Larochelle rushed to answer, and from the living-room Pierre could see, in the half-light of the hall, his big, tormented head, greedily alert to the voice which identified itself at the other end of the wire. "Hello," he answered. "How are you? Is the cocktail party over? And that blonde? You . . ."

But Yvon Letellier had something urgent to discuss with the lawyer; he wanted to see him at once, but begged him not to mention his name to Pierre Boisjoly, who was involved in the matter. The latter's suspicions must not be aroused. It was business of the utmost importance, and Robert Larochelle would find himself amply rewarded. The lawyer, overcome by the promising mystery in which the voice invited him to participate, and dazzled by the vistas it offered his ambition, mechanically raised his head toward the living-room and looked at Pierre as though he were a different person.

"You must come at once, and without fail, to the Lion d'Or. And not a word to your wife, either!"

"Certainly! 'At your service!' the lawyer almost jabbered. "I'm on my way."

He grabbed his overcoat off the hook and ran rather than walked toward the living-room. The Attorney-General's nephew! And Pierre Boisjoly! A matter of the highest importance which would be very profitable to him! In a voice of triumph he announced: "You must excuse me! I have to see a very important client on an urgent matter. A very serious case."

Dumbfounded, her hands flat on her lap, Fernande objected, "But surely it could wait until to-morrow. We have a guest."

"Suppose I were to tell you that it is as serious as a murder," her husband ponderously replied, eyeing Pierre strangely.

The young man gulped and rose abruptly. "Then I must leave, too."

"Not at all!" exclaimed Mr. Larochelle, effusively clapping his hands on Pierre's shoulders. "Amuse yourselves with a bit of music. Wait for me. I'll be away an hour at most."

Pierre's knees willingly obeyed this husbandly injunction. The door clicked behind Larochelle, whose stumbling tread was heard upon the stairs. The air seemed too heavy to breathe. Fernande had turned to the keyboard and was strumming lightly. That unbearable third person was now gone, leaving them both to their unavowed complicity, in this tiny box of a room where their two hearts beat heavily.

"Come, sing this," she murmured.

He drew near her timorously, his eyes troubled and his throat tight with emotion. How far off the piano seemed! The four walls were watching him, and it would take at least eight steps to carry him to the proper point behind

her rounded shoulder, over which hung her precious hair. But he was getting there, though his clothing might have been made of paper, so sharply audible to him was its astonished rustling. Fernande did not turn her head, and the closer he came to her, the lighter was the touch of her fingers upon the keys. Had people other than the two of them really ever existed on earth? In all the world there was room only for them. He saw his own enthralled face reflected in the varnished surface of the piano, and she was smiling tenderly at the outline of the broad shoulders that were also mirrored there. She stretched out a hand to draw toward her a music book open at *L'Invitation au Voyage*, and she began playing the accompaniment to the song.

"Sing," she told him under her breath.

His voice constrained and hoarse with feeling, he began to sing in a plaintive tone: "My child, my sister, think of the sweetness of travelling thither, and dwelling there together."

He did not see the tears come to birth in Fernande's eyes; he saw them only when they lay, shining almost happily, on the curves of her cheeks. His voice quavered and he stopped singing.

"Tell me . . . all the things that have happened to you since last year?"

She stopped playing in her turn, and with imploring vehemence clasped him by the arm and made him sit sideways on the bench, so that their faces were almost touching and their bodies throbbed against each other. He noticed her bosom, heaving with emotion, and Denis Boucher's words rang in his ears: "Mademoiselle is my mistress. We sleep together!" And did he feel no jealousy?

"Happened to me?" she finally managed to say. "And what happened to you? When you ran after Denis on that

dreadful evening I shall never forget, what happened then?"

A great disappointment welled up in his heart and overflowed into his very depths, heavy as stone, a disappointment he did not try to account for. The fever burning throughout his body could feed only on the absolute presence of this adored Fernande, to whom he had been fated for centuries. And now the cord was severed. The past, the outer world was getting the upper hand. He was annoyed at himself for having asked the first question. "What happened?" he repeated. He had to make an effort to recall Pierre Boisjoly's story. Oh, yes, the death of the old lady. She didn't know? Why not tell her all, confide his tragedy to this deep, receptive tenderness? But his old defensive attitude prevailed. "What happened? We quarrelled, that's all."

"That's all? Tell me the truth, Pierre!"

Now it was he who had tears in his eyes. She had called him Pierre! "That's . . . all," he said. "Please, please don't press me any further."

She tried to look into his eyes, to penetrate his mind, and her anguished voice heightened the cry of her whole being.

"Pierre . . . when Denis Boucher came back that night, he told me to clear out. His face was as white and cold as marble. He told me never to see him again. He gave me every cent he had, though I did not want to take it. He offered no explanation, and I left."

"Were you in love with him?" he asked, lowering his eyes.

She wrung his hand in her distress. "I was pregnant!"

His childish jealousy was suddenly dissolved into shame by the deep concern her answer awakened in him. Then a new and terrible pain drove its first shaft down into his soul: thanks to him, another person's life had been wrecked. In his headlong career toward a splendid destiny, and in

spite of his ideal of purity and love, he had left victims behind him. All greatness is reached at the expense of those who are dearest to us. He snatched at a last hope.

"Had you lived with other men, before him?"

"Pierre!"

"Forgive me," he groaned. "I'm beneath contempt. Your heart is pure. I have always known that."

She wept, in silence, and then began to speak in a low husky voice.

"I was the fifth child of a large country family. You wouldn't have heard of our village. My father owns a store there. My brothers received a fairly good education; as for the daughters, my father's idea was that they were fit only for marriage or the convent. My parents' dream was to see several of their children enter the religious life. The eldest, intended for the priesthood, became a notary; the next two, though, who never said much about what they wanted to do, became Brothers of the Christian Schools. My parents saw how studious I was, so they let me finish high school in the hope that I would become a nun. But my heart and mind yearned for other things; the radio, the newspapers, the magazines brought me echoes of a wonderful world, full of interest and variety. I was thrilled, and I hoped that the dreamy little girl I was would get farther than a convent or the counter of a village store.

"When I had finished my last year of school, I timidly informed my father that I had decided to enrol in the School of Social Service at the University. I can still hear his furious reply. It seemed a bit laughable then, but now it sounds more like a curse. 'During the depression,' he said, 'our country girls went to the cities to work as servants and they ended in the gutter; to-day they go to the cities to work in factories or to study, with the same result.' You can't imagine, Pierre, how those words wounded my convent-girl's modesty. My shyness turned into sullen

determination, and I told my father that he hated the city only because the automobile now made it possible for farmers to do their buying in town for better terms than they could get from the country merchants. The result was a falling-out which lasted until my marriage.

"I had saved a few pennies, and I departed for the city where I rented a cheap room in the Latin Quarter. Then I enrolled in the School of Social Service. Soon my little hoard melted away and I worked as a waitress in the evenings to earn my keep. That's how I met Denis. He always came at about the same time, toward midnight. He sat alone, and read while he ate. The other waitresses found him handsome and tried to flirt with him. He wasn't shy; you felt he was strong, and quite detached, and at the same time very kind. One evening as I was waiting on the table next to his, I was insulted by two sailors on a spree; they started putting their arms around my waist. I was terrified; but I saw Denis—I didn't know his name, then—throw aside his paper. He walked over to us and grabbed each of the men by the shoulder. They let go of me to concentrate on Denis, who smiled at them mockingly. The owner and the cooks came out to help him. The sailors began threatening Denis in English, but he just listened to them and smiled. Then he said '*Get out of here,*' in a voice so hard that they backed away from him and went out, cursing.

"I thanked him, and he made a remark which seemed to me strange at the time: '*Not at all, Mademoiselle. At bottom all men are a little like those sailors. You have to rebuff them without punishing them too much.*' But the sailors loitered on the sidewalk across the street, and I was scared when I noticed that they were watching me through the plate-glass window. Denis Boucher had seen them too, and when I happened to pass near him he said under his breath, '*Don't be afraid. I'm waiting for you; when*

you're finished I'll see you home, if you like.' I wasn't nervous any more. I suddenly felt glad, and proud. To the other girls' amazement he left with me, and the sailors daren't make a move. Denis walked slowly beside me, his hands behind his back as though he were alone. Out of courtesy he came down to earth now and then, and asked me a vague question. And he succeeded in getting my brief story from me, bit by bit.

"From that moment on he seemed to discover me and take an interest in me, and with a generosity that seemed to me so uncalculating that it stirred me deeply. He came back to the restaurant, took me home a number of times, and without my being really aware of it, he drew me deeper each day into a world that enchanted me—his world. His unbending and lofty conception of life soon became my own, and all my actions and thoughts centred on this extraordinary man, at once hard and gentle. I felt myself protected by his strength, and it gave me a feeling of happy tranquillity.

"He had always treated me with respect. One evening last spring, while we were sitting in a park, he ran his hand gently through my hair, and hesitated, and then said, 'I'm going to tell you something which will perhaps hurt you. But I hope that it will not lead you to hate me or hold me in contempt. I don't know whether I'm truly in love with you, but I find you lovely and I want you. I had a wonderful mistress in Italy during the war, but her eyes were less beautiful than yours. And you please me as no woman has ever pleased me, because in the desire I have for you there is none of the contempt I feel for women in general. Didn't I tell you that men are all a little like those drunken sailors? Are you angry?'

"I had not learnt to show any anger I did not feel. How could I have been angry, when I was so astonished and so troubled? I stammered that my upbringing had

not prepared me for hearing things of the sort, but inside myself I understood, without the least anger, exactly what he wanted to suggest. Above all, I thought of my father's diatribe against cities, words which I especially wanted to prove false." Denis immediately added, "I have too high a regard for you to propose marriage, because if you were my wife you would be miserable. Yet if you can live with me and not let the spectre of sin spoil your happiness, I can give you an attractive little home."

"The man's a devil!" Pierre cried out. "I suppose you accepted!"

"He's a man," Fernande said reflectively. "No, I did not accept. I replied that under those circumstances, we could not see each other again. He took my hand and held it, and wished me happiness. But after that farewell, I felt as lonely and lost as a swallow in a shuttered room. The days went by, getting emptier and sadder all the time. My studies, my job at the restaurant, the other girls' lack of understanding, the disgust the customers aroused in me—there is nothing more repellent than the sight of men and women eating, for hours on end—it was too much, and I began to lose heart. Should I go home, where I was looked upon as a fallen woman? What could I do! And I was a woman, Pierre; the thought of Denis, his strength and his tenderness, coloured my whole life. I met him by chance while I was strolling in Montmorency Park between lecture periods. He was sitting on a bench, smoking, and staring out over the harbour."

Pierre was now listening with growing dread. Fernande's narrative had reached that culminating point where the interest with which he had been following it was turning into sharp pain. And he had first felt that pain the moment she spoke of the bench in Montmorency Park where Denis was sitting. Perhaps the same bench on which Pierre had collapsed in tears after Father Martel had rejected him?

Fernande's story would certainly disclose that after this meeting she had yielded to Denis ! And as for himself, it had been from this bench that he had set forth to meet the Attorney-General . . . and then Fernande, whom he had never expected to see again ! He muttered, in anguish, " I don't want to hear the rest."

" No, Pierre, you alone have believed in me, and you would lose that belief if I did not tell you everything. At least you'll be able to judge me, and . . ."

His reply burst forth, generous and unconditional—" And love you !"

Gently she put her hand over Pierre's embarrassed mouth. After a few moments, she continued : " So Denis was sitting on that bench. When he saw me, he smiled like a happy boy. Pierre, listen to what I'm saying. Grand resolutions, stern endurance, are not for women. Women can rise to heroism only for their children, or their man. When I saw that friendly smile, all my resolutions melted away. The impulse to surrender was infinitely sweet to me, and I said without a moment's thought, ' Take me home with you.' "

Pierre started to draw away from her, but she held him back. " Don't be too hard on me. I was a young girl without friends, worn out, at the end of my tether. A strong, friendly man was offering me his affection."

Pierre spoke vehemently. " I'd not have taken advantage of your situation. I'd have treated you with respect and reverence, I'd have slaved to make you happy, I'd have slept outside your door to defend you from harm !"

" I know, Pierre. I knew that the first time I ever saw you. But Denis was a man of thirty ; he was burdened with experience, with regrets and desires. You yourself are already far along the way to that hungry period in a man's life when dreams and romantic self-denial give way to the need for a woman. And I can swear to you, Pierre, that from the very outset he took an interest in you that

I've never seen him take in anyone else, not even in me. All through your prize-giving, he was in a state of excitement. He spoke of you as of an extraordinary being ; he was carried away with enthusiasm for your ' life-line.' I think he longed to be both your elder brother and the mighty opponent with whom you would dare to cross swords."

" I want to be neither his brother nor his enemy," snapped Pierre. " He simply does not exist ! "

" Yes, he exists, since because of him both our lives have changed their course."

Pierre's jaw tightened in hatred, and he said nothing. Fernande quickly added, " Of the two months I lived with him, the last day, when I met you, is clearest in my memory. All the other days seem drowned in a routine ; I lived close to him the way a cat does, having its neck stroked absent-mindedly and never being told anything. Yet, that awful night when you went after him in a taxi was the first time a man—you—thought me supremely important. And when Denis returned, he threw me out. Something very serious must have happened, something you don't want to tell me."

" He threw you out and he knew that you were pregnant?"

" No. I did not know it myself."

Pierre felt disappointed. Moreover he had asked the question with a naïveté which would be hard to satisfy, without knowing exactly how and when a woman learns that she is pregnant. He kept an uneasy silence.

" I didn't know until a week after I was married. For I married exactly fourteen days after I left Denis Boucher. Yes, Pierre, you have good reason to look at me with amazement. As soon as Denis had sent me away I found, so to speak, my own dimensions. I had just been through an experience quite outside the world to which I belonged, the world of a young girl, in which marriage to a kind, good man is by far the most important thing. All women seek

husbands ; even the highbrows do, whether they admit it or not. If I was unhappy and humiliated at being thrown aside by Denis. I was even more so—once I was free from that dominating personality, which had overpowered my will and my conscience—at finding I was only a little country girl soiled by sin. To stifle that feeling of being a lost woman, I went back to the University and attended summer courses. One noon, as I was having lunch in a small restaurant, I found myself at the same table as Robert Larochelle. He soon started a conversation.

“ The childish joy, the boyish enthusiasm lighting up the face of this mature man—it was a comforting experience after the bitter, reserved Denis I had known. He told me his story ; how he left the Jesuits and began his law course, and was just through. He was as keen as a young lad just starting out in life. He asked me to go to the movies, and at the end of the evening I told him that my parents had wanted to make a nun of me. I can see him now ; he threw up his arms and exclaimed with joy : ‘ It’s fate ! We were made for each other. Will you be my wife ? ’ I began to laugh, because I couldn’t answer in any reasonable fashion. He kept after me for a week. What was I waiting for ? ‘ Life is short,’ he said. ‘ Look at all the precious days going by, and here I am, pawing the ground, eager to make a good team out of the two of us. Hurry up and accept. We’ll triumph over everything. I’m a lawyer, and full of vigour, yet I feel that without you I cannot forge ahead ! ’

“ Just as I had yielded to Denis’s desire, I yielded to Robert’s feverish enthusiasm. He was security, and he would be kind to me because he had known the religious life. We were married the following week, and it was during our honeymoon that I realized I was pregnant. I was terribly upset, and any intimacy with Robert made me feel ashamed. He mistook that for repugnance. He had

never known a girl before me, and in his innocence he had imagined that a woman was a sort of amiable sexual machine in which marriage gave him proprietary rights. He was badly frustrated, and he was ambitious. He began to live the frantic life of a man trying to make up for lost time. He started to make scenes like the one you heard just now. But I've seen him as he really was, and I know he feels that Satan is at his heels all the time. He rushes after success like a madman because he needs it as a shield. He has to make a bad joke of the years he spent in the novitiate. He attracts so much attention only because he's for ever trying to live outside himself. He's afraid of death. Several times a night he'll wake up, just to listen to his heart. My life with him is a martyrdom. I'm even more lonely and desperate now than I was after Denis sent me away and I felt so lost. And then to find you again to-night, Pierre ! Oh, if only I still had my child ! ”

She burst into tears and clung to him, her head on his shoulder. Dazed and enraptured, he silently comforted her ; at first his hands moved awkwardly, not knowing how to caress, but love soon taught them.

The warmth of her forehead against his cheek, the throbbing weight of her body sunk in his arms and pressing against him with absolute trust and abandon, drew him so far out of himself that he saw the old Pierre Boisjoly fading into the distance in a cloud of petty youthful worries produced, no doubt, by the inner idleness that precedes adulthood and its stern realities. He felt his flesh tingle with excitement and surprise. This goddess with her lovely body had dazzled him for the first time in Denis Boucher's room ; the very sight of her this evening had renewed and intensified his madness ; and now—wonder of wonders !—here she was in his arms, weeping, grateful for his caresses, confessing to him her loneliness and misery. Was he not responsible for this stupid marriage ? He had a sudden

flash of insight. Was this the sorrow of a mother, or was it the unconscious impulse of a woman made to be dominated and loved?

As though she guessed his thought, Fernande gently stroked his shoulder and said, "You, Pierre, were my destiny; I know it. But now it's too late. I'm just a waif."

He raised his head defiantly. "No! You are no waif! Fernande . . . from now on you are my ideal, my only love, and I will fight for you. We'll go away together, to the little village where my friend Labourdette lives. We shall be happy there."

"Pierre!"

She had straightened up, and with her hands on his shoulders was gazing at him in tender dismay. Blinded by his passion he did not see the look in her eyes, and went on with mounting excitement.

"Yes, we'll clear out! I'm unhappy too. Everyone forsakes and betrays me. I have only you. Come! You surrendered to Denis Boucher, and then to this lawyer, why not to me? I love you!"

She shook him gently as though he were a heedless child. "Pierre! You forget that I am married and a Catholic!"

"Then why did you weep, and cling to me?" he asked her vehemently. "I'm almost beside myself! You must come with me. Now. Rules, laws, they're all meaningless. We shall have to make the world over for ourselves."

"If I were to go with you, Pierre, as I yearn to do, I should lose the one reason I have for living—sacrifice. We'd soon be torn to pieces by remorse, and we'd come to hate each other."

"I'm sick and tired of remorse," he protested impetuously, "and I love you! What you've told me proves that our lives are linked together for all eternity."

"And the sacrament of marriage, Pierre?" she asked, in anguish.

"The sacrament of marriage?" He looked at her stupidly, as though she had suddenly torn a mask from his face.

"The sacrament of marriage," he murmured again.

A sound of footsteps on the stairs made him jump to his feet. The noise ceased, and he drew his hand across his forehead. Then he looked dazedly at the four walls, one by one, and saw a photograph of Fernande and her husband at the church on their wedding day. And what of his call to the priesthood, what of the old lady, what of that still-born child?

"What am I doing here?" he said heavily, and stifled a sob.

"My poor, dear Pierre!" she moved toward him with timidly outstretched hands, her lips trembling.

He went out to the hall and grabbed his hat and coat. She followed him. Wringing her hands, biting her lips to keep back the words that would thrust her upon him for ever—"Take me with you!"—she managed to say gently, "Don't go! Men always want to smash everything. We can still be friends, Pierre."

He towered above her, and while she was thus imploring him, her head level with his heart, he saw in all their clarity the details of that wedding picture on the living-room wall. He closed his eyes, and when he spoke his voice was bitter.

"I wanted my life to be a journey toward the absolute; I have succeeded only in stumbling from bad to worse—if good is what we ordinarily think it is. I'm not made for a quiet, easy existence. I want to be absolutely damned or absolutely holy; purgatory doesn't interest me. Fernande, I love you and I want you and I've spoken honestly. I beg your forgiveness for all the harm I have done you and would have done you. I'll go to hell alone. Good-bye!"

"Pierre! Take me with you!"

He went down the stairs at a run.

His face on fire, breathless from the tumult of his thoughts, he caught sight of the Franciscan chapel with its spire tapering gently into the starry darkness. And at once tears wet his eyes. There it was that Fernande went to worship, and there it would have made him happy simply to have the right to kneel beside her, to feel the lace of her dress touching his body as they prayed. Oh ! to have a woman's tenderness soften the harshness of his man's existence, not a mother's or a daughter's tenderness, but the gratuitous tenderness that comes from the ends of the earth, to be enfolded in one's arms for ever. He saw himself again as an altar boy in the sanctuary of his parish church, dressed in his red cassock and moving soundlessly as he served at Mass. In an ethereal silence charged with mystery, good Father Loupret moved slowly along the altar, his eyes lowered, already a partner in the approaching miracle of the Consecration. How gentle and quiet were those mornings in the soft glow of the sanctuary lamp ! When the Holy Sacrifice was finished, they would retire to the sacristy, he and the old priest, like a father and his son returning from a fine voyage. Fernande was in his mind as he summoned up those scenes of days gone by. Of days gone by—the very words old people would use ! And never would he possess Fernande in pure and holy sweetness. She could belong to him only in the violence of damnation—the delusory transports of passion, the furtive happiness precariously enjoyed—for sin would always be there, implacably present.

He walked more quickly, flicking back his felt hat in a gesture long habitual with him. His lips moved, almost uttering the phrases that jostled in his throat. After all, could he remain very long, kneeling beside her as he had imagined, uniting his prayers to hers in an exalted love ?

No. Soon his eyes would dim ; the altar, the church would disappear, and a single fierce desire would obsess him—to take Fernand in his arms, and carry her off, and devour her with kisses.

And that business of her relations with Denis ! How smoothly she had avoided the details which could have tortured him. Yet in that Latin Quarter room, while that good-for-nothing watched, she must have undressed, and then, surely mad with pleasure, swooned beneath his caresses—for had she not been pregnant ? And more—every minute, every hour, for days on end, her every loving thought had been for Denis ; time and again she had thrown herself into his arms, and wept on his bosom ! She had said nothing of that !

He scooped up a handful of snow and swallowed it. But anguish was invading every fibre of his being, more and more scorching, more and more unbearable.

4

HE had walked for two miles, lost in his appalling visions of that love-making, and already he was at his rooming-house. He went up the stairs like a drunken man.

"At last ! Here's my ex-chauffeur !"

Willie Savard, his face made radiant by his rediscovery of whisky, was standing at the door of Pierre's room, his stubby hands crossed on his belly ; he examined Pierre with bleary eyes and a beautiful smile.

"Don't look so startled ! How goes your career ?"

Pierre, his hand gripping the rail, had stopped short in stupefaction on the last step, trying to pull himself together and face this new reality. Finally he stammered, "You've left the sanatorium ?"

"Better than that ! I ran away. I guess I was lonesome for you."

"And you're drinking again ?"

"Yes, to help you out. Stop looking at me with the eyes of a fried tommycod and let me in so we can talk quietly, just in case the police are not too far off."

Pierre nervously fished for his key. The police ? Of course, the Attorney-General ! The tentacles of the octopus of life continued to pursue him without respite. Larochelle's mysterious remark, after the telephone call which had caused him to leave in so great a hurry, came back to him now : "It's as serious as a murder !" And the lawyer had looked at him in an odd way. Pierre loosened his necktie. Willie Savard flopped down on the bed, reached into his inside pocket, and tossed upon the table the envelope containing the negative.

"Well, there's the famous packet you gave me to keep for you. I return it untouched. I've not opened it. I may say that it's cost me another bout with the bottle as well as a small fortune. You play pretty rough, my boy, don't you?"

Pierre took the envelope and slipped it distractedly into a drawer.

"I play rough and I don't enjoy it any more. All I want is to be kind and charitable. What happened?"

"Too bad. If you wanted to keep on playing rough we could be rich, and quite powerful, too. You'd make a splendid partner. Forgive me for having asked you to be my secretary."

"Tell me, quick—what happened?"

The business man pulled a bottle of whisky out of his overcoat and took a long swig.

"Drink Willie my friend, you need it," he mumbled, staring at the linoleum on the floor. "It'll stop your asking too complicated questions. Two chaps who said they were interested in seeing me prosper. Very powerful in the Government."

"So my telephone conversation with Father Lippé was intercepted!" Pierre exclaimed. "I thought so." But his comment barely interrupted Monsieur Savard's soliloquy.

"They talked to me about timber limits I've been trying to get for five years without success. 'It's in the bag for you,' they told me. I hastened to offer them cigars. What had I done for the good Lord, to deserve such a favour? Then I thought of the statue I had brought Mother Cecilia. For I'm a trader, I am; even with the Lord; it's my view that you don't get anything for nothing, any more than in business. A sacrifice—a reward; a sin—a punishment. You follow me? I guess that's the reason why everybody understands religion so easily. It's a system of barter with

heaven or hell. But the Lord got me all mixed up that time ! The two fellows made it conditional : I'd have to hand over the envelope you had entrusted to me. I acted dumb. What envelope ? I knew nothing about any envelope. And I wasn't tight then ! I was just getting back on my feet. Too bad, because I was doing very nicely. They left, saying, ' As you please. No packet, no timber limit.'

" Then I asked myself what had come over me. For a damned envelope, handed me for safe-keeping by a young swell-head who had already cost me four thousand five hundred dollars, I was losing the timber limits of my life. And then I said to myself, ' You promised, Willie. You promised. That boy was good to you. He defended you against Big Dick. He bought roses for your wife.' But those wonderful damned limits kept knocking my noble gesture into a cocked hat with their magnificent birches, fifteen inches in diameter. Millions of them. Oh ! how I suffered ! I just had to get in touch with those two chaps. I rushed to Mother Cecilia's office, I assured her that my health was excellent and spoke to her of a business matter of the highest importance that required my presence at the office. I jumped into the Buick. I must have been doing eighty miles an hour. Suddenly I noticed the big clock in the steeple of Saint Sauveur church and I thought of broken clocks, of me weeping in the middle of the wreckage and you helping me out of the house. So I stopped at a Liquor Commission store and bought three forty-ounces, which I immediately began to drink with holy energy. You were saved. Don't ask me whether your salvation served me as excuse for quenching my thirst, or whether my thirst was an excuse for saving you—we'll never know, anyhow. In any case, I've been waiting for you an hour. What's the matter with you ? Are you crying ? "

Pierre sat hunched in his chair, his eyes closed, and he

didn't even raise his hand to wipe away the tears which ran slowly down his cheeks.

"Thank you, 'Monsieur Savard. You are kind and generous. It does one good."

"Come ! come !" growled Willie Savard, hastily grasping his bottle and taking another drink. "Wow ! it's hot in here."

He took off his coat, and sat down again on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. Then he diffidently inquired : "Tell me—is your father still living ?"

"No, he died while I was very young. My mother is a charwoman. I've already told you all that."

"Oh, yes ! True enough," said the older man, clapping his hand to his forehead. "That's partly the reason, I suppose, that I go to so much trouble to try to help you. And you're never willing. I have a son, you know. He's a notary and leader of a temperance movement ; when I stay drunk too long, he tries to get me locked up, but my wife won't have it. You were right to buy roses for her. It made me think of sending her some this afternoon. We were terribly in love when we were young, so much so that we became almost welded together. She can sniff at me all she wants when I come home, and I can beat her all I want—we're still welded. My son, who thinks me disgusting, said to me one day when I was drunker than usual, 'You sickening old brute, if only you'd die !' I never have any trouble remembering that !"

The business man wiped away a tear. "But you don't act like that."

Pierre managed to put his own troubles aside and enter into Willie Savard's loneliness. "Monsieur Savard, take back that negative ; it's yours, to give to them in exchange for those timber limits. At least someone will be happy."

For an instant the old man's eyes shone with greed ; then his mouth swelled into a great pout of sadness. He took

another draught from his bottle. "No. It would make me look like the old trickster I usually am. I would have put on an act of being kind, really knowing that would be the way to get the better of you. No, I didn't come here to put through a deal, as was the case with the statue. Then again, when it comes to the statue, there could be an argument. You know why my son wants to have me locked up? I stand by the window, I look at nothing in particular, and then I tear all the bank-notes within reach into tiny, tiny pieces. That's all. Keep the packet for yourself. You'll need it."

Pierre looked fondly at this old hulk, marooned in his room as though it were the only harbour he could find that day. Only a certain shyness prevented the young man from going over to comfort him and try to make him smile. Then bitter pain constricted his throat.

"You loved your wife dearly. And in spite of that, and after all those years, you are so unhappy? All the people I know seem to suffer more and more as they grow older. Does everyone, then, take the wrong turning?"

Willie Savard grasped the neck of his bottle as though it were a weapon.

"I've never thought very much about whether others found the right road or not. But I guess it must be about the same for everyone, even for those who don't like whisky. As for me, I began life as though I were entering a tunnel, except that the other end of the tunnel seemed to me large out of all reason. Like looking through a telescope. The farther you go, however, the narrower the tunnel becomes: you constantly get caught against its walls, you're covered with filth, you're heavy-laden and out of breath, and you often turn around to try to catch a glimpse of the fine days you had at the beginning."

"Then it's better to die right off!" Pierre murmured.

"Die?" said the old man, taken aback. "Not interesting."

Especially if the others keep on going—the ones I like and the ones I don't."

"The ones I like." Pierre quivered. He no longer saw Willie Savard; that tragedy no longer had meaning for him. It was Fernande's image which once more filled the room. While he stayed here listening to this strange old soak, she was sitting alone on the couch, her hands clasped on her lap, still upset by her awakened memories, by his own declaration of love. She had cried, "Take me with you!" But he had run away. She had been Denis Boucher's mistress, and now, along in the middle of the couch, or perhaps lying on her bed, she awaited that disgusting lawyer who had got her to himself for life. And she was lovely, and he, Pierre, had been made for her, from all eternity, as she had been made for him, the whole of her, body and soul. Her beautiful hair, her eyes, her mouth, her arms! He groaned, and then said abruptly, "Well, Monsieur Savard, let's call those three women you had around the other night."

Astonishment flattened Willie Savard's fat face. "Not my three mares?"

Madness was at work in Pierre's brain, and now he plunged into the bitter, evil void that waited to engulf him.

"Call them what you like. I'm sick of reaching for what is splendid and noble, and grasping nothing but bitterness and regret. I'm in the tunnel, too; the only thing for me now is to push through it with courage, like the rest, and do my best to shake off my illusions, one by one. I can no longer hope to be a saint, so I'm damning myself as I promised I would. No contemptible half-measures for me!"

"A reference to the Gospels isn't the best of beginnings. Are you really serious?"

"Call those three women, I tell you!"

Pierre shouted the words, as though to fan the flames of

his rage against himself, his disgust with Pierre Boisjoly—Pierre Boisjoly in quest of Splendour—who, torn by a hopeless love, hunted by remorse, and surrounded by enemies, was struggling in the toils of a vast spider's-web spun by himself in his pursuit of greatness. Life handsomely avenges itself against those who seek to conquer it. What a come-down! He was now imploring an old drunkard to take him to a brothel!

"I want to defile myself!" he repeated wildly.

Yes, to make himself filthy, to cast off that dreadful virginity in which, even yesterday, he had so greatly gloried, and which was now a source of unbearable jealousy to him. Then he could go back to Fernande on her own level, and say, "Now I have nothing to forgive." But the passion that had joined Fernande to Denis would always be there, like a chasm, to separate them. Pierre's veins seemed to shrivel; he gasped for breath, his mouth half open, his forehead covered with sweat.

"Or' rather, no . . . don't call the women. Please don't!" He grabbed the whisky bottle from the business man's hands.

"Hey, that's mine! Take an unopened one," said Willie prudently. "It's unlucky for two to drink out of the same bottle."

Beside himself, Pierre drank the whisky as though it were water. He drained half the bottle at a single draught, while Monsieur Savard watched dumbfounded.

"For a milk-drinker, you're not bad."

Pierre set down the bottle and then jumped as though he had received an electric shock. Concentrating on the metamorphosis that was being wrought within him, he remained motionless; his eyes, haggard at first, became glassy.

"As for my mares"—a new soliloquy was starting—"I'm happier this way. You're not the type. People like you

make love as though they were starved, and then they grow sad and go to confession, and that bores the girls stiff. A friend of mine, a notary and the most pious fellow in the parish, begged me one day to take him along when I went on my next visit to my stable. He wanted to take his mind off things. He entered the room like a lion entering an arena full of Christians. I can still see him with his big grey moustache jumping at Germaine. Later on he was as downcast as a dead man, and began reciting his act of contrition with his paunch squashed down on his knees, while Germaine sat beside him panting for breath. Not to mention the Novena which he made his whole family begin the next day. As for me, I take it as a kind of sport. I make them run, I beat them. My mood doesn't change. In short, I like it better this way. We can have a quiet talk. Tell me the story back of that photo. Pretty interesting, I imagine?"

Then he saw that Pierre had fallen asleep on the bed. Willie Savard shook him lightly and then, glancing at the forty-ounce bottle Pierre had half-emptied, he nodded. He moved to the foot of the bed and with his fat, shaky fingers unlaced Pierre's shoes and took them off; then he muttered through a hiccup, "Fine young lad. There aren't many of your breed."

He slipped on his jacket and overcoat, collected his bottles, put out the light, and left, closing the door gently.

Pierre slept for fifteen hours. He emerged from this coma, brought on by a mixture of whisky and despair, like a cancer patient who regains consciousness after being sent back from the operating-room without an operation. His disease—intact, jeering, victorious—was on hand to greet him the moment he awoke. Pierre let cold water from the tap run over the back of his neck until the relief it first brought him turned into unbearable pain. His

brain remained heavy and slothful, and his body was enervated by a listlessness such as he had never felt, a listlessness fed by the almost palpable vision of Fernande, more lovely and more desirable than he had ever imagined her. Then suddenly Willie Savard's remark about tunnels came back to him. He was barely twenty, after all; the April sun was good; it would be easy for him to evade all his problems by executing a smart about-face, as young men can often do when confronted with something that irks them. How serious were his offences, in the eyes of the world? Madame Boisseau's death? An accident known only to himself and Denis Boucher; an accident for which he, Pierre, was not in the least responsible. But in the eyes of Pierre Boisjoly all the filth he had touched during the past few months grievously tarnished the formidable goal he had set himself—to live in purity and splendour, to say No to every sin, even original sin. Life had taken up his challenge to weak human nature and thrust him into this frantic whirlwind, which buffeted him more and more violently and would toss him, breathless and defeated, before a tribunal he already saw looming beyond the fury of the storm. Who would be its presiding judge—God, or Satan? Certainly he would accept immediate judgment rather than wait, like Willie Savard, for the end of his days.

Now that the Attorney-General had shown his hand there was no longer any point in going back to the office in the Parliament buildings. Pierre sat down near the telephone. It would surely be set ringing any moment now, by one of the tentacles of that octopus which was ever more tightly encircling him. Was Fernande perhaps waiting too, near the instrument in her hallway? Pierre's hand several times hovered over the receiver, and he even touched it, but without lifting it from its hook. At five o'clock it finally rang, without startling him in the least.

"Hello!" It was Fernande's voice, hoarse and furtive.

" Pierre, something awful is happening. I'm coming right over. No one but you is any good to me now ! "

He had said " Yes " in a barely audible voice, but his yes was so affirmative, so absolute, that she hung up. He stretched out at full length on the bed, closing one by one all the doors of his consciousness, until only one remained open—the door of his wildly beating heart.

5

THAT was her step, quick on the stairs, then hesitated before the numbered rooms. He opened his door. "Fernande!"

She was carrying a small suitcase, like a student back from the holidays. She was pale, she wore no make-up, and she ran to him not like a woman surrendering herself but like a frightened child. She tossed the suitcase on the bed, and without taking time to remove hat or coat she threw her arms around him. He had been standing quite still, exalted, blissfully silent. Now he drew his long fingers back over her hair, and tenderly down to press the nape of her neck.

"I've come to live with you for ever. There can be nothing sinful about that, any more."

He closed his eyes, and felt within him a blessed tide of happiness that rose and overflowed. It was the proud and boundless happiness of man the protector, the powerful, on whose bosom the woman he has loved and desired finds refuge, weeping now like a bewildered child though only yesterday she had refused and opposed him. This potent happiness overcame every practical consideration, every twinge of conscience, since desire had not yet revived to challenge the tenderness he felt as her champion. He took off her hat, kissed her hair, and said gently, "You did well to come. With me, you need fear no one. I'm stronger than all of them put together."

"But, Pierre, the Department of Justice is hatching something against you, and they wanted to draw me into it."

He could not repress the dread and dismay that seized him, and he made her sit down while he tried to regain his self-assurance and strength. A few moments ago, when she

first came, he had seen her as the beloved woman who at last was going to be his own, but now he looked upon her rather as a faithful friend come to warn him of a plot that might be threatening his very life. He forgot that perhaps she would live with him, that she would be his mistress, that his aim henceforth was to be happy despite heaven and hell, despite the whole world, and despite Pierre Boisjoly the Splendid. He sat down on the edge of the bed and asked, in a voice that betrayed his anxiety, "What are they hatching against me?"

She took off her coat and crouched down at his knees, clasping his hands with a fervour that ran through her whole being, widening her eyes and increasing the huskiness of her voice.

"Pierre, they can do nothing, now that I have left my husband for you, now that I'm yours for ever. Yesterday, about ten minutes after you left the apartment, my husband came home in high spirits, obviously very pleased with himself. He showered attentions and politeness upon me—I'd grown unaccustomed to that sort of thing, lately. And then he said to me, 'It's up to you, now. If you say the word, we can have a brilliant future, and at last I can land a job in the Attorney-General's department!' He kept repeating this and staring at me, simply eaten up with ambition. Then he began to grumble. 'You don't seem exactly carried away with curiosity,' he said.

"I asked him what it was all about. 'Oh, that's a secret until to-morrow. I'm not the one to tell you. It will be the Attorney-General's nephew, young Yvon Letellier, with whom I've just been talking. He's an extraordinary lad who will go far. He wants to see you here alone to-morrow morning. I'm just bursting with joy! I wish I could tell you about the amazing opportunity we've been offered. But I promised not to say anything immediately. Tell me, dear Fernande, you will accept young Letellier's proposi-

tion? Promise me! You know one can reach the heights only by making concessions which may seem a tremendous at the moment. When the goal has been reached, they look very insignificant back there in the past.' Such talk irritated me, but still I was curious. You can imagine, Pierre, how I've disliked this young Letellier ever since those closing exercises I attended at your school. 'At least,' I said to my husband, 'explain yourself; give me some idea of what it's all about!' 'I promised I'd keep it secret until to-morrow!' he said; and he rubbed his hands like some poor money-grubber who's coming into a fortune. He kept marching up and down the apartment, like a caged beast, and then he suddenly stopped in front of me and said, 'Did you notice that you made a great impression on that Pierre Boisjoly? He likes you, doesn't he? Oh, don't act like a silly young thing. Women know when they please a man. Tell me, do you please him?' I was so angry that he may not have seen how anxious I was. 'Yes, and he pleases me too!' I said. Then I went to bed. I slammed the door behind me, but I heard him shout, 'Alleluia, victory is ours!'

"I didn't sleep a wink all night. That wonderful and terrible hour with you had left me shattered, and now there was this mysterious plot in which Yvon Letellier and you and my husband and I all seemed to be involved. I lay awake and listened to my husband's footsteps; he paced up and down until morning like a madman, drinking coffee, tripping over chairs, quite beside himself with joy. For the first time since our wedding my husband made breakfast. He went to his office earlier than usual, as though by leaving me alone he could hasten Yvon Letellier's arrival. Before he left he put his hands together and said, 'Fernande, you will agree, won't you? Our future is at stake.' It was like a prayer."

Pierre had been listening, with passionate intensity,

stroking Fernande's hair as she leaned against his knees. She kissed his hands, and said with a shudder, "And now you begin to see what hatred and ambition can do to men. Young Letellier arrived around eleven. He made some flippant remarks about our shabby lodgings and then started to laugh at my obvious anxiety and defensiveness. 'Relax!' he said, and winked at me. 'What I have come to suggest to you is quite agreeable and interesting, if you are as intelligent as I think you are.' He offered me a cigarette and sat down jauntily on the piano bench with his hands around his knee. 'Your husband will get a post in my uncle's department all right, but it depends on you. I insisted that I be the first to broach the matter to you; husbands always make a mess of discussing things with their wives. They're so used to concealing things from them that they're not convincing when they tell the truth. Here's the story. Through my own fault and as a result of circumstances I can't take the time to explain, Pierre Boisjoly, who spent last evening here, is subjecting my uncle, the Attorney-General, to the most shameless blackmail.' 'I don't believe you,' I cried. 'Pierre is incapable of blackmail!'"

Pierre's only reply was a groan of rage, heavy with the denials he wanted to make in his own defence. It was the Letelliers who were forcing him into this detestable blackmail. But then, why not hand over his negative and disappear in the crowd of the poor and the unfortunate? He'd do it, the very next day. He'd send the negative to them in the mail. "Thank you!" he said, in a low voice, and his hands tightened around Fernande's head. Silently she accepted the caress, and for several seconds they remained motionless, their eyes shut, as though united by the faith she had shown in him. Then with an effort she continued, in a voice choked by fright and indignation.

"Then Yvon Letellier's voice took on a harder tone. Oh, you think Boisjoly's incapable of blackmail? Poor

lamb. Anyway, I see that you like him, and that will make your job all the easier, for I think he has more than a passing fancy for you. Dear lady, the weapon Boisjoly has against my uncle is a photographic negative. My uncle is using every means to buy it from him, but nothing will do, and as I am to blame for the events recorded in the photograph, I feel I should undertake to get hold of that negative for him. 'Thanks to you, I think I can succeed. And you'll be well rewarded.' And then it was, Pierre, that he told me the hateful part I was to play. I was to seduce you, gradually arousing your desire for me and then letting you come to our apartment during my husband's absences, until one day he would come with a witness—Yvon Letellier, of course—and surprise us. You can imagine the rest. There would be a scandal; I would beg you to give up the negative in order to save my reputation, and you would do it for love of me."

"Some day I shall probably kill Yvon Letellier," said Pierre in a quiet, level voice.

And instantly a vision of the old lady stretched out dead on the floor appeared to him. He was horrified, and dared not raise his eyes for fear of perceiving the calm presence of God watching the operation of His immanent justice. In one dreadful moment Pierre clearly saw all the persons of his drama putting their shoulders to the wheel, like irresponsible players acting out their parts—to the wheel which would soon fling him, Pierre Boisjoly, his sacrilegious adventure ended, at the foot of the Calvary where his punishment awaited him. His agitation increased Fernande's distress, and she went on more rapidly.

"I told the little beast to get out. 'You don't mean it!' he sneered. 'It's a good thing I came. Suppose I were to inform your husband that before your marriage you were the mistress of a certain idler in the Latin Quarter? Your home would break up, and you'd be in the street, a cast-off,

for you're well enough acquainted with your peculiar lawyer to know that righteous anger would drive him to abandon you—especially if, in spite of that, he could have the appointment he wants, and so cut you off from any share in his success.' By this time I was weeping with indignation, and I sent him away. 'You're a monster!' I said. 'I refuse!' Tell my husband whatever you want. I've no further interest in him, since he thinks he can offer me for sale. And I'll do everything in my power to defend Pierre Boisjoly; I'll inform him of the whole dirty business!' He called me a name I won't repeat, and went away whistling. I telephoned you at once, but there was no answer."

"And I was asleep!" said Pierre. Yes, sleeping like a clod! He thought with horror of the three women he had asked Willie Savard to call; and Fernande had severed all her ties to come to him—to a young man of twenty, doomed to a tragic fate. Why fight Yvon Letellier? Why kill a man who had merely given him an excuse for deserting his vocation and falling more deeply in love with Fernande? And Pierre seemed to have entered her life only to lead her astray. Now Fernande had come back to him, as it were, like a bad cheque. In his innocence, Pierre had seen in her a mirage of happiness, a happiness he had bought on margin, gambling with the profits of a splendid life. And since then he had not felt a fraction of the elevation of spirit which the simplest of his boyhood prayers used to give him. He hid his head in his arms. Events were hammering at him harder and harder; their weight and intensity were becoming more than he could bear. Within the hour, perhaps, to-day's Pierre Boisjoly would no longer exist, and eternal despair would follow, since the only satisfactions open to him would be those of the senses.

Fernande, puzzled and deeply disturbed by Pierre's attitude, pulled his arms apart and took his head in her hands.

"Look at me, Pierre. I am yours. You love me, don't you? I believe you; you will take care of me. I told my husband so when I left him just now, after a terrible scene! He had come to his senses, and asked me to forgive him. He said that ambition had almost driven him crazy. My answer was cruel—I was almost happy that he had tried to make such use of me, since that justified me in wanting to leave him and go to you. Before I left I screamed at him that I was going to throw myself into the arms of Pierre Boisjoly, the only man I ever loved, the only noble man I had ever known. From now on we belong to each other, Pierre, my darling, my beloved."

Her eyes blinded with tears, she sought Pierre's mouth, and there her lips melted in a kiss transcending all eager, brief desire, the kiss of a mother, lover, and child commingled, a kiss that probed for the soul, to surrender to it utterly. All else faded, and disappeared. Pierre held in his arms the woman who had changed the entire course of his youthful destiny; he had her all to himself, pressed yieldingly against him, close against every curve of his body. But this was the way she must have pressed herself against Denis Boucher, when first she went to him for protection! He moaned, and drew away, leaving her trembling. Stumbling over to the desk, he took out the negative. His words came haltingly.

"You don't know all that's weighing on me. It would be even worse to share my life, than it is to share your husband's. And it would be adultery. Adultery! Your husband has wept, he has asked forgiveness. Forgive him, make him happy. That is the way of salvation. As for me, I forgive him, I forgive everyone. Life is short, and God is long. Give this negative to your lawyer; it will have cost him nothing. And we, both of us, shall be better persons."

Astounded, her eyes wide, her lips forming words he

could not hear, she crept toward him and wound her arms around his knees.

"Yes, let's give it to him, surely let's give it, but I will stay with you. I don't want to see him again; what would my life be with this man, and away from you? It's not a matter of adultery, when my life with my husband is nothing but disgust and revulsion; there can no longer be adultery when that husband has wanted to sell me, and when the man I have chosen is Pierre Boisjoly. What has happened to us, Pierre, is far beyond sin. Don't you see that I am owed to you, as a reward or as a punishment?"

His breath short, his head afire, he clung to the tottering remnant of his conscience, to the stubbornness of pride. "Deserved or not, I want no reward; I want no one to owe me anything. That way, I should be nothing more than a creditor, and that is the beginning of littleness."

Only for an instant was she vanquished; then her face lit up in a cry of victory. "Then there is nothing left for you except to be great and to be guilty. You cannot refuse the punishment, nor can you choose it. Take me, Pierre, since I am the punishment. It's no whim that throws me into your arms—it's a sea of events that has left me stranded on your beach, beyond the reach of another tide. Pierre, take me, especially if it means a sacrifice for you!"

He groaned: "It would be no sacrifice! I love you! But it would also be the end of everything."

Fernande was gradually recovering from her fright; she saw the dawn of victory in the sad stammering of this big lad, held prisoner by his own nobility and torn by his love. He filled her whole horizon, and a burning thirst—a thirst that she could slake in no other way—urged her to lose herself in him for ever, with a woman's absolute abandonment. These twinges of adolescent conscience—he would soon forget them, as she had forgotten them under the blows of life. There is never a way to elude sin, she told herself

in her distraction ; it is a whirlpool into which generous natures are inevitably drawn. Sooner or later Pierre would fall, and the very thought of his being with someone else filled her with desperate energy and resource. For it was she who loved him, she who had burnt all her bridges in order to leave Pierre no choice but to accept her.

Standing before him, her tears drying already in the clear warmth of her smile, she flicked off her high-heeled shoes, and with a graceful movement of her head brought the heavy hair tumbling around her shoulders. She walked to the mirror, smiled gently at her own reflection, and looked at Pierre as though to invite an affectionate compliment ; then she moved to the door to make sure it was locked, straightened some scattered books, picked up her hat and coat and asked Pierre to hang them in the closet, and, while he mechanically did so, went over to the little radio and tried to find some music.

" Not that knob—the other ! " Pierre said, suddenly seized with a timidity and excitement that tightened his throat.

He had the impression of being transported from his familiar surroundings. Fernande's perfume softly pervaded the room, and Pierre in spite of himself was setting foot in a new universe from which all the past seemed to have been removed and stowed away in the attic of his childhood. It was not only to his eyes that she seemed lovely and sweet, but to all his senses and his heart as well ; the core of anguish he had always felt within him seemed now to be opening miraculously into a voluptuous flower. Was it possible ? Could Fernande be his for ever ? She looked just as when first he had seen her, on an old street in the Latin Quarter, glancing at him with tender curiosity, her head pulled to one side by the slow stroke of her comb and the lines of her body moulded by the damp wrapper. At that time he had seen her as infinitely remote. To-day she was wearing a little black dress, very simple, with white

dots ; her skin was soft, her lips pouted appealingly, and the fever of love was replacing the tender curiosity in her eyes. And she was in his room, and her shoes stood near the fireplace, and she was speaking to him.

"Pierre, it is not impurity that brings us together. In a big book, written thousands of years ago, it was said that I was destined for you, that I should be the daughter of a village merchant, that I should be drawn toward the city and there should meet Denis Boucher, through whom I should discover you, and because of you I should marry Robert Larochelle—only in order to find you again and keep you for ever. Nothing in the world can prevent you from saying 'My Fernande.' Fate has made you my master. Submissive, blissfully happy, unobtrusively yet passionately devoted to you, I shall take my small place in your hard life as a man."

These words bemused Pierre ; he docilely obeyed the hand that drew him down to lie on the rug, like a child, while she sat close beside him on a hassock, pressing his head against her warm, yielding thigh. So many years of exalted search for the impossible, quietly falling into ruin beneath a single caress ! He wept with joy, and Fernande's lips and her hand and her whole body murmured to him, "My little Pierre ! We shall live together in sweet contentment, wherever we may be." No longer could he resist ; all that remained to him was to whisper a farewell to the fierce idealism of his young years, in the heartrending words you utter to a child you are abandoning. His words, his tears, his heavy words and tears, were muffled in this thigh, smooth and swelling like the curve of a lip.

"Fernande, this is the first time in a long, long while that I have been happy, and it's the first time I've felt ashamed. Not for a moment did you accuse me of cowardice because I tried to leave you in the lurch ; for love of me and because of me you abandoned everything to come here.

You have believed in me, and that is what tortures me—because, believing in me, you could not hope that I would take you lightly ; and yet, alone and desperate as you are, you have acted with a blind faith that shatters me ; you ennoble the inevitable wrong that raises its barrier between us. My childhood was spent in a poor and vulgar home. I was shy, and could not lose myself in play as the other children did. From the first I was tormented by the necessity of choosing between death and greatness. I have always had to face essentials. There is only one choice possible ; either God at every moment, with the superhuman effort that that involves, or every moment for itself, with its easy, fleeting pleasures. I chose God. I could make no other choice, devoured as I was by thirst for the absolute. I chose God and the road that leads most directly to Him—the priesthood.

“ Through cowardice, Denis Boucher did not want to choose ; he wanted to prolong his illusion of an earthly eternity. I feel sorry for him. For years I lived in the immaterial happiness of prayer ; I lived without remorse, my eyes fixed on heaven and my heart joyful in its exalted hope that in rising toward grandeur I should be carried far beyond death. I paid no attention to humiliation, or to success ; my dream soared high above them. Then I met you and I loved you ; immediately I began to be sensitive to the Letelliers’ meannesses, to the glitter of ambition. I was blinded, and I transferred my first choice to some lofty purpose, in which you could be included. I gave up my vocation ; the heaven that had been close at hand eluded me, but I did not realize it and I ran toward you, groaning in foolish incomprehension under the blows of circumstance that fate dealt out to me as though to say, time after time, ‘ You are wrong.’ And I did not turn back because I was carried away by my vision of you. I believed that that vision inspired in me the same pure exaltation as my

prayers. . I reached you, and I desired you ; and the hard God of my childhood, Whom I had forsaken, though without betraying Him in sin, now shows me that compromise is no longer possible between you and Him. I love Him and I want to serve Him, I want to be great for His sake ; but you are here too, unhappy, and loving. I feel myself humbler and happier now, lost in your arms."

As Fernande listened to this confession her eyes became fixed, and her body stiffened. It was so all-embracing that it stilled the wind of folly which had blown her toward Pierre. This boy was a saint, and under the guise of tenderness she had been trying to corrupt him and tear him away from his true greatness. With Pierre leaning against her and avowing his tragedy, she was now reverting to her true self, her desire was changing to veneration, her love rising to the level of maternal self-sacrifice. What had she come here to do, and why should she not accept her revolting life with Robert Larochelle, to whom she had sworn fidelity at the altar ? This sacrifice she would offer up for Pierre's salvation, so that he might continue on his way toward the heights. Still stroking his hair, she tried to draw away.

"You're right. I was mad. I must go home and accept my lot, and love you all the same."

He grasped her savagely in his arms. "No !"

Gently she disengaged herself. "I love you, Pierre. You have opened my eyes. That is why I am leaving. You are right—to-morrow, this evening, this very moment I could become a burden which you would make it your duty to carry all your life, out of decency."

Pierre had jumped up and was stumbling forward to stop her. The arguments she had advanced, instead of confirming his own, turned him against them and kindled in his body an animal terror which utterly submerged the sentimental outburst in which he had indulged a few moments earlier. Wherever she might go, Fernande would

be vanquished and defenceless. Were she to go home, her position weakened by her brief desertion and by the threats she had made to her husband, she would be resuming with him a life that could not last. Where would she turn? She would rush to Denis Boucher, the father of her child, and throw herself on her knees, imploring his help.

"Fernande, you shan't go; I'm keeping you for ever!" he said harshly.

Her face drawn, her eyes wide, Fernande fought desperately against herself; her mouth drooped piteously and her throat grew tight as she clung to her decision, shaking her head to express the "No!" she could not utter. The telephone rang, and Pierre picked up the receiver.

"Pierre? This is the Attorney-General. I hear that my nephew has been up to his old tricks. He's incorrigible. I want to see you."

Pierre laughed nervously, and even in the midst of this crisis he felt a resurgence of the old fears, the old angers. "And the intercepted telephone call?" he asked. "And the proposal made to Willie Savard? I suppose all that was your nephew's doing, too!"

At the other end of the line the voice grew curt and threatening. "Very well. If you want us to play it rough, my boy, you shall have your wish."

"Do whatever you please!" Pierre shouted, and hung up.

The effort of will which had carried Fernande to her decision had collapsed during the brief seconds of the telephone call. Hat in hands, she had sat down like an exhausted beggar waiting for alms at the doorway.

That "Do whatever you please!" which Pierre had hurled at the Attorney-General had, as it were, put a seal on the belligerent self-assurance he felt after telling Fernande she must stay. Now he spoke calmly. "Between now and to-morrow, perhaps this evening, the web of circumstances that is strangling me will be stripped away in some sort of

catastrophe. I don't yet know what it will be. But I want you to be with me when it happens. You'll stay here and rest for a few hours. I'm going out, to do some thinking."

"Pierre ! Don't leave me alone !"

He took away the hat she had just put back over her hair and kissed her forehead. "Lie down on my bed and wait for me. If I were to stay now we should both be defeated, and you would share a punishment which is meant only for me."

Happy, quiet, she accepted these mysterious words like a balm and let her head fall softly on the pillow which he awkwardly slipped beneath her neck. Was he not leaving on tiptoe, like a loving husband who promises to return early in the evening ?

OUTSIDE, he was surprised to find that there were still streets, houses, people. So it was spring? So it was evening? But Fernande was lying in his bed! Suddenly he lost the inexplicable self-assurance he had shown Fernande before leaving her. Was his adventure reaching its conclusion? Was punishment on its way? Was he keeping her as a witness? What was this mad idea he had invented to detain Fernande and yet avoid succumbing to temptation? Would he not, if necessary, have spoken even of his own imminent death? What was he doing out here while she waited? Where was he going? Would it not have been logical for his fatalism of a little while back to have inspired him now to surrender himself to the Attorney-General, and admit the part he had played in the death of old Madame Boisseau? Yet that he could no longer do; Fernande would be discovered in his room and dragged into the case. Then he was nothing more than a coward who tells himself tales of gallantry? The hours would pass, and he would return to Fernande. And there would have been no catastrophe. No longer could he send her away.

“Oh! Boisjoly! At last!”

Robert Larochelle, his face haggard, was waving at Pierre. He had lost his air of portly pride, and looked like a fat, bewildered child. A priest walked beside him, frozen in lofty compunction and to him the lawyer kept turning anxiously.

“Boisjoly! I’m looking for my wife. I frightened her—only in fun, but she took the whole thing seriously. Imagine! In her agitation she told me, as she was leaving, that she would seek refuge with you. But I see that can’t

be true, since you're away from your house, and alone, and apparently quite composed. You haven't seen her?"

Pierre coldly stared him in the eyes, his glance like a blade.

"No, I have not seen her, Monsieur Larochelle."

"Good Lord! Good Lord!" said the lawyer, coughing nervously and looking to the priest for counsel. "Antonio!"

"Then there's no use running about at random!" said the latter in a bored voice. "Let's go wait at your place and have a good game of chess. She'll come back, all right. I'll preach her a little sermon, and then everything will settle down."

"And suppose she doesn't come back, Antonio?"

"Come, come! Don't get excited. She'll come back."

"Good evening!" said Pierre indifferently.

He steeled himself to walk along with apparent non-chalance until they were out of sight. So, Larochelle rushed to these priests he made such fun of the moment he felt a disquieting tremor in the tightrope on which he walked! Pierre felt his own heart expand with relief and triumph. He had no regrets for having denied that he had seen Fernande. He was shielding her, now, from the man who had every right to take her away, and that victory made her more his own, more vividly present in his room. He had taken care to turn the key in the lock. For a few minutes he was intoxicated by these thoughts, oblivious of the dilemma which had forced him out of doors. Suddenly he stood electrified in front of a movie advertisement showing an almost naked actress languorously stretched on the sand. He mechanically looked away, and his glance fell on the belfry of the Basilica.

A sharp pain penetrated his whole being and made his eyes glaze over. It was the beginning of a new and more violent crisis of the soul, an omen of the ultimate suffering. Where could he turn? The pack of events in full cry was

coming closer and closer, cornering him in his last hiding-place. And once conquered, how would he be destroyed? He felt a surge of energy. No, indeed, he would not be conquered! He would drop his prey—Fernande—and thus divert for a time the threat of these ravenous events. He must reject this love which was slowly making him the prisoner of its miracle and its sweetness. Yes, reject it with scorn and disgust.

He rushed like a madman toward his mother's dwelling. He would see that suspended lodger, and—dear God!—if he were to catch the man embracing his mother in the little room where he had lived as a student! Would not he and Fernande become a little like that, as they grew older? They would have nothing more to say to each other, and to escape from their silence, they would fill it with those caresses that drive men to despair and make them moan for the happiness of those who have remained great.

He went in without knocking.

"My little Pierre!"

His mother pushed up her glasses, laid aside her knitting, and jumped spryly to her feet, smiling with happiness. Only the creaking of her chair, which continued to rock, made any sound in the kitchen.

"Where's the lodger?" asked Pierre, disappointed.

"He's left," she replied, and blushed. "Why don't you come and live here now?"

She spoke as though to a child who had returned after years of absence. Was he so changed? His mother had changed, too. Already she seemed like a happy old woman, and surely she had sent this lodger away on his account. He would return here and sink into the obscurity of the ignorant and poor. Here was salvation, peaceful ease near his mother, the charwoman. He stammered, "Yes, Mama, I'll be back to-morrow at the least, Here, take this money."

He emptied his pockets—four hundred dollars, which he hastily tossed on the table. Hastily, as though he were in a tremendous hurry. And he left without noticing his mother's marvelling surprise. He walked quickly. Would he get to his appointment on time? What appointment? At his mother's house, had not found any cause for a disgust that might sever him from Fernande. He had discovered there only a maternal gentleness and loneliness, the same feminine gentleness and loneliness that now cast a halo around the warm vision of Fernande, alone in his room. It seemed to him as though his heart filled the whole of his chest, and suddenly he became aware that he was tramping past the presbytery where Father Loupret lived, old and forlorn. He hesitated. No, he would not go to confession, recount all that sordid story, all that suffering, to get an absolution which could not prevent his desiring Fernande. No, he could not be cruel enough to display his degradation before the very man who had wanted to make of him an outstanding priest.

What a pity! What a pity to be Pierre Boisjoly! And it had all begun when he had couched his lance against a loafer who gibed at him, calling him a chipmunk!

That was the man who had started the whole business! That monster Denis Boucher, Fernande's lover. Pierre's heart was drained of every generous feeling; a hard fury gradually drew all his muscles taut, and glittered in his eyes. Now he knew why he had left Fernande, why he had run from his mother in such haste. His appointment was with Denis Boucher, and he had delayed so long in admitting it to himself, had disguised it with evasions, only because at that appointment his adventure would reach its tragic end. "Let me never lay eyes on you again!"—that's what you said to me!" Pierre muttered between his teeth.

He was walking like a robot, each long stride bringing him measurably closer to the last abyss. Not for an instant

did Pierre imagine that Denis Boucher might have moved, or that he could be elsewhere at this moment than in his room, among all those knick-knacks. Reaching the house, he kept up on the stairs at the same steady pace, moving mechanically toward the inevitable. Then he rapped once on the unlatched door. It opened wide, as though pushed by a blast of wind, and there passed a few seconds of terrible silence during which Denis Boucher's listless form, stretched out on the couch, stiffened and came erect to face last year's young seminarist, whom by sheer chance he had started on the road to damnation and who now, standing motionless in the doorway, seemed like a ghost come to settle accounts. Trying to hide his confusion, he made the only gesture which at the moment could help him keep his composure: he plucked the cigarette from his lips and flicked it, still burning, into the air.

"I told you I never wanted to see you again."

The harsh line of Pierre's mouth widened in a scornful smile. He answered in an implacable, monotonous voice, "Monsieur does not like to be disobeyed? That's too bad!" and he shut the door with his heel.

Denis Boucher, expecting trouble, leaned against the desk in an elaborately casual attitude and kept a close watch on Pierre's hands and feet.

"Before going any farther, tell me. Have you a revolver? Did you come to kill me? If so, get busy."

"No, no," Pierre purred. "Worse than that. I have come to make you suffer. You are through with your refusal to choose, your denial of both virtue and sin. Thanks to you, I went astray, and ever since, all who have come in contact with me have been seared by misfortune. You have made me into a carrier of suffering—and you are peacefully growing older, puffing at a cigarette, quite satisfied with yourself?"

Denis Boucher gave him a sad, weary glance, and

sympathetically shrugged his shoulders. "Satisfied? You say some interesting things. How much we change in a few months! Didn't you ~~see~~ ^{know} that you, at least, would triumph?"

"You can't win when you aim at what ends with death!" Pierre cried, with a sob he furiously sought to suppress.

"Good! You're making sense. Now get out."

"I repeat that you're a coward. You don't want to see your victims again; you think that by driving them away you can also drive away remorse. Because of the old woman's death. . . ."

"Real courage would have made you tell your story to the police. . . ."

"But I couldn't stomach you as my accomplice. That was what I was really ashamed of."

"Get out, I tell you!" snapped Boucher, stepping toward him.

"Because of the old woman's death, because of me, you drove away Fernande, that pure and despairing child, whom you sheltered only to make her your mistress, your mistress who rolled around with you on that couch, and who was pregnant when you sent her packing!"

Pierre saw the pallor spread rapidly over that mocking face, imparting to it the hue of terror. The man's shoulders drooped defencelessly. He made an effort to speak. "Pregnant! Who told you that?"

Pierre answered exultantly. "She told me herself!"

"And the child?" The animal anguish with which Denis Boucher murmured this question suddenly reduced Pierre's fury to shame. He vainly tried to cling to the sight of the couch on which this child had been conceived, but now he could see there only a small white coffin, closed tight, and the father who came too late. His lips trembled.

"Forgive me. The child is dead, still-born long before it was due."

And another phrase sprang from the very depths of his being. "Like my vocation, Monsieur," he added.

The two men confronted each other, their shoulders sagging a little, their pain showing in their faces.

"Yes, that's true—like your vocation. I killed them both. It was because I desperately wanted to save you that I said to you, 'Get out!' as long ago as the evening the old woman died. For I love you as the only brother I acknowledge in this world. It was because of this absolute brotherhood that I invited you here a year ago. When I realized that our meeting was turning you against your vocation, it was too late. My smiles and sarcasm that evening disguised my anguish. I felt responsible for you. I had you in my care. On a mad impulse I dashed off to the Letelliers', but you followed me—and then the tragedy happened. Evidently I was destined to bring you unhappiness; so I told you to get out, and I say it again to-day. When I returned to my room, I drove Fernande away too; yet I loved her. Three of us living together—the ghost of a priest between Fernande and me—it was impossible. And I had a child! Where is Fernande?"

This man loved Fernande! And certainly from now on, because of the child, he would want to have her back! Pierre's heart savagely wrapped itself around the beloved image, and his whole being armed itself to defend her against this man who first had taken her. All the rest—the spoiled vocation, the death of old Madame Boissieu, heaven, hell, the dead child—melted away the moment he felt this new threat of losing Fernande. And his antagonist stood there in front of him, saying he loved him like a brother! No!

"Where is she?" Denis Boucher asked once more.

"In my room. Lying on my bed. The door is locked."

"In your room?"

"Yes, in my room. She loves me, I love her, and she

has given herself to me for life. What difference can it make to you? You sent her packing."

With his satanic, triumphant fluency, he felt that he was pouring boiling words into the staring, bewildered eyes of this Denis Boucher who had thought himself strong enough to interfere in his destiny. He quickly related to him the events that had shaped his life during the last few months—his meeting with Fernande, the story of her marriage, and the drama of the last few hours. Then, his throat dry, his head afire, his muscles tensed for battle, he waited.

Boucher looked at him for a long while, distractedly, then walked over to the wall and unhooked the guitar. He began to pluck the strings, giving full attention to his performance as though he had nothing else to do. "It was 'Stardust.'" Leaning over the instrument, he asked, "So this will be the first time you have ever slept with a woman?"

"I didn't say that!" exclaimed Pierre in exasperation. "I said that I would keep her, that you would not have her!"

Boucher made one of the strings vibrate so that it sounded like the stroke of a gong, and laid the guitar aside. He looked at his fingers, then abruptly sprang to his feet, his features suddenly hardened by an irrevocable decision.

"You are going to send her back home. Phone her from here. You must not see her again!"

Pierre gave a nervous little laugh, betraying the fierce feeling of victory that bristled in his heart. "Jealousy, now? How touching."

"I want to save you!" said Denis harshly.

"I won't concede that you ruined me, or that you should presume to save me. Those are things one does for oneself. I have decided to keep Fernande, and that's what I came to tell you."

"Exasperated virgility makes you ill-tempered, Boisjoly.

You're not going to see Fernande again," Denis continued calmly. "Come on ; call her !"

"Good-bye !" said Pierre, grimly smiling. "This time we shall not see each other again."

"That's your last word ?"

"Good-bye."

Denis Boucher picked up his overcoat. "On your own head be it. I'm going to confess to the murder."

"Just what I was waiting to hear !" exclaimed Pierre. "Go right ahead. Go on !"

They clattered down the stairs and reached the sidewalk at the same instant. Pierre stood still for a moment, his heart cowering in his chest, his eyes anxiously following Denis Boucher as he strode off, his coat flapping in the breeze. Pierre called out his address to him, adding, "So you'll have no trouble finding me."

A great peace invaded him, and he felt cold. Denis Boucher was taking on himself the shame of reporting the crime ; Denis Boucher, who would not take Fernande back.

TIME had ceased to exist since Pierre returned to his room and knelt beside the bed. Fernande, lying there, had cushioned his head against her body, stroking his troubled face with a loving hand and for an hour, perhaps, comforting him in silence, her fingers wet with his tears.

"Everything is over and done with," he finally murmured into the hollow of her hand.

"Nothing is done with, my dear, since I joyfully renounce everything. We are two unhappy people, brought together by God. For could there ever be any question of vulgarity between us? The laws of church and state are what make men evil. Let us try to be good and love God outside the rule of law. Perhaps there may be room for great happiness outside the pale. I'll love you until death, Pierre."

It seemed to him that she was discussing a dilemma that had tortured him in the distant past. He shivered. His headlong race was finished, and he waited, motionless on the edge of the cold night, for the stroke of doom. Yes, it would have been good to nestle against Fernande, to hold her tight while he sobbed and drink in her warmth and her calm confidence. Such a redemption, though, would be superficial, since he would sink to rest against her, like a panic-stricken fugitive, only to have to say hurriedly, after a while, "I love you, but you must go now; the police will be here any moment!"

With chattering teeth he stammered, "Fernande, you must leave. You will never see me again. I'd rather keep you pure all my life in the depths of my heart than possess you once at the end of this last stage of my journey."

She took his head and raised it. "What's happening, Pierre? There are so many mysterious things you don't tell me. I have a right to the whole truth. I've told you everything about myself. Pierre, if you love me. . . ."

No, he would not tell the sordid tale of the murder, in which he would have to involve the name of Denis Boucher. But he was too tired to keep his secret any longer, and the words came out.

"Fernande, any minute now I shall be arrested on a charge of complicity in a murder. I'm not guilty, I swear to you. You must not be here when they come."

The words availed nothing against the passion of a woman in love. Fernande sat up, filled with a burning exaltation. "With you I will share every shame, every glory, every suffering. I want no security without you. If they come, I shall be at your side and I shall cry out to them my joy and my pride in loving you."

She took him under the shoulders and gently drew him toward her. He groaned, defenceless, "All is lost."

At this very moment—it was midnight—a cab drove up at full speed and ground to a stop at the door of the lodging-house where Pierre had his quarters. Denis Boucher stepped to the pavement and helped an aged priest to get out. It was Father Aristide Loupret.

"Go right up. I'll settle with the driver. Good luck, and good-bye!"

But he no longer existed for the old man, whose eyes were wide with the intensity of his hopes. "If only I'm in time," he thought, as he climbed the stairs, stumbling in the dark. "My little Pierre, my little Pierre!" he muttered, praying as he went. Number Six. That was it! His thin knuckles tapped on the door. The sound of hasty shuffling reached him. Then Pierre's firm voice called: "Come in! We are ready."

The old priest felt as though his blood were congealing as he pushed open the door. His Pierre stood there in the centre of the room, proudly holding by the hand the lovely young woman who had figured in Denis Boucher's strange confession. A twinge of jealousy seared the old priest's heart.

Pierre, spellbound by the apparition, dropped Fernande's hand and moved hesitantly, dazed with surprise and shame, toward this black statue which smiled timidly with its thin lips and which, when Pierre was very close, whispered to him with angelic roguishness, so low that Fernande could not hear, "I am the police come to arrest you!"

Pierre felt his cloak of lofty courage, so belatedly and laboriously assumed, fall from him and collapse absurdly at his feet. His eyes widened, and his lips began to copy Father Loupret's smile. His whole chest swelled, as if for a great cry of joy, and yet it was in the same whispering tone, too low for Fernande to hear, that he asked, "So it was to you that he made his confession?"

The old priest answered with a little nod. Then he turned his eyes toward Fernande, straight, pale, and so very much alone in the middle of the room.

He glanced back, fearfully, at Pierre. "Have I come too late?"

Pierre shook his head mischievously. His childhood was recaptured!

"Thank You, Lord!" murmured Father Loupret.

Then this old man became very business-like; his manner, losing its tinge of diffidence, was again fatherly, affectionate, and commanding. "Then we must talk. Come."

He took Pierre by the arm as though Fernande had not been there.

Pierre saw the young woman, still motionless in the middle of the room, and if a sudden shame and anguish

prevented his saying a single word, he heard all too clearly the message of those sorrowful eyes. "You are abandoning me. I know that now I am losing you for ever. My love, my *Pieŕre* !"

The little old priest, however, was dragging him into the hall, perchance toward his salvation. He resisted. "One moment, Father. Let me be fair to her."

He turned back and quickly opened the door. "Fernande I'll be here again in a little while !"

She did not turn around ; she had thrown herself, face down, on the bed, and was sobbing. He wanted to rush to her and say, "I'm not abandoning you !" But Father Loupret closed the door and dragged him, like a stunned animal, toward the stairs.

Father Loupret, thirsting to give absolution, carried away by his desire to plunge this child into mercy and to bring a cleansing grace to life in his soul, could not endure the thought of the long half-hour which separated them from his presbytery. He literally threw himself through the half-open door of the *Basilica*, where a late service of adoration was in progress. Pierre, exhausted, let himself be led, as meekly as a lost child found at nightfall. The sound of the organ entranced him from the moment his feet touched the stone pavement of the church, and its triumphant music warmly enveloped him. And what silence, too ! The silence of true miracles. He dipped his fingers into the tepid water of the stoup and made the sign of the cross. Then he genuflected.

"Come, come !" the priest impatiently, whispered. "That far corner will serve very well." And as soon as they were settled there, he said, "Make your confession. Tell me everything ; forget nothing."

This command opened a heart too long constrained. On his knees in the smiling silence of the church, caressed by

the organ's breath and illuminated by the altar, watched by an old woman here and there whose attention had been caught by this whispered colloquy, Pierre let his ten months' suffering pour out of him. From time to time Father Loupret helped him with a word to clear the dregs of pride which would occasionally cloud his confession.

When Pierre had finished, he perceived through a mist of shame and weariness the solemn gesture of absolution which the aged priest was making with his eyes closed in holy ecstasy. He protested feebly, "No, Father, I don't deserve it. It's too easy. I don't deserve it."

"My dear lad. It was all those terrible months which were difficult. All will now be easy, since you have deserved well of God."

"But that old lady lying dead?"

"You are in no way guilty, and you know it well. And if this remorse nevertheless remains in you, marry it to original sin, so lonely in the hearts of saints. For you will be a priest, Pierre, a saintly priest."

"A priest!"

His lips trembling, Pierre gripped the back of the pew, and his eyes widened in an incredulity that gave way to joy. The vision of Christ, which had grown blurred on the day of the prize-giving, reappeared, bright and sovereign above the altar. Splendour again opened to Pierre its everlasting arms and he hurled himself into them with a loving abandonment beyond prayer. Father Loupret cradled this rapture with wondrous words. "Proud boy. You thought that poor human contingencies had sullied the path that leads to heaven and true happiness. You had begun to pave it all in white, and the moment your first confused feelings as an adolescent had spotted it with their shadow, you sullenly turned from God, who smiled sadly at your intransigence, but Who was waiting for you. He pursued you everywhere with His grace, and every time

a way out seemed to offer itself to your proud flight, He forestalled and blocked it. Think of the road you have travelled. Is not His finger visible at every point along it? Was it not guiding you through this hard but necessary journey in order to teach you what you lacked to reach Him—humility and love? Love, Pierre, that which makes the world beautiful and gives it a divine refulgence. Those Letelliers, Denis Boucher, the Communist, the whisky-bibber, the lawyer—what you needed was simply to love them, to love them more and better than you can have loved that young woman, for the love that engenders desire is not Christ's love for the unfortunate. Love, Pierre, and the world is saved."

Pierre slowly raised his head and said, "I am happy."

They left the church, and for several minutes they did not exchange a word. Then the old priest coughed. "I know that you are thinking of that young woman. Let's go to your room and close that book for ever."

There was no one in the room. On the desk Pierre saw the negative, ripped into tiny pieces. A folded piece of paper lay beside it. Eagerly Pierre read the two hastily scribbled lines: "Pierre, God is right. Pray for me. Fernande."

He let the note drop. She had torn up the negative which would have served only to sell her back to her husband. She did not wish to make any profit out of the humiliation of her return. Pierre breathed her perfume, which was slowly dying in the air, and when he noticed the impress her body had made upon the bed he felt a start of pain.

But Father Loupret was watching. He exclaimed in a playful tone, "Let's pick up the scraps of this negative. To-morrow you will send them to the Attorney-General. That's the way to begin to love him. And come along. You'll sleep at the presbytery. You know, that bottle

of wife is still in the steel filing-cabinet, waiting for you."

Father Louprét had insisted upon his entering the *Grand Séminaire* immediately. A few day later, a light suitcase in his hand, Pierre once more passed through familiar streets. His footsteps brought him quite mechanically to that quaint little thoroughfare in the Latin Quarter which leads to the Seminary. Then his heart started to beat as though it would hurt. Denis Boucher was leaning casually against his house, smoking. Pierre launched a timid smile in his direction, and Denis smiled also, very gently.

Then Pierre began to walk quickly. Was it an illusion—that stealthy shadow with long hair he thought he saw slip by the window? No, he was mistaken. "Grant me this, that I am mistaken, Lord!" His calm happiness was threatened once more; confusion was seeking to repossess his heart. At last he reached the door of the Seminary, and leaned there, out of breath. He must rediscover peace and joy, since he was to become a priest. For the last time he turned toward the city, toward the world he was leaving, and at the sight of it, an anguished cry of farewell died in his throat. Had Fernande gone back to Denis?

A gust of love at last exalted his whole being. "Lord, for Your sake, I am willing never to know!"

He disappeared behind the great door.

THE END

